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Recent Community College Alumni: Increasing Donors Through Communication and Engagement

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RECENT COMMUNITY COLLEGE ALUMNI: INCREASING DONORS THROUGH
COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Beverly Loraine Rufty under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Dedication

This dissertation in practice is dedicated to my amazing husband James; without his constant encouragement, unconditional love, and unwavering support, this endeavor would not have been possible. To my beautiful children, Parker, Nathan, Anna, and Sam. I love you, am proud to be your mom, and hope you feel inspired by my journey. To my incredible Mom and Dad who have given me unconditional love and support my entire life and have believed in me and made me feel like I could do anything I put my mind to. To all my other family members who continuously pour into me and support me with encouraging words and love. All of you shaped who I am today. Thank you, and I love you all very much.

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Thank you to my wonderful cohort because, without you, I could not have completed this journey. You helped me and motivated me to do my best and complete this journey together. Thank you to my exceptional coworkers for being supportive and encouraging. You planted the seed for this entire journey. To the alumni association who so willingly allowed the partnership and took a chance on me and this partnership. Thank you for trusting me with this project. Last, but not least, thank you to my friends and family for believing in me and for pushing me to excel. All of you are the best!

Above all, I want to thank God who gave me a thirst for knowledge, instilled in me the desire to learn, and granted me the ability to complete this doctoral program.

Abstract

RECENT COMMUNITY COLLEGE ALUMNI: INCREASING DONORS THROUGH COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT. Rufty, Beverly Loraine, 2023: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

Due to ongoing financial cuts and budget restraints, community colleges have turned to alumni association fundraising to support their mission and advance their institution. Fundraising for any organization is challenging, but community college alumni institutions have a more difficult time than their university counterparts in recruiting alumni donor support. Community college alumni associations must maintain effective communication to successfully engage recent alumni and build relationships with potential donors. The purpose of this study was to analyze the literature and data collection using a convergent mixed methods design to address the lack of financial support from recent community college alumni. This study incorporates action research to answer the question, "Why are recent community college alumni not donating to their alma mater?" This study is beneficial to any higher education institution needing to revamp its fundraising efforts. The findings of this study are presented in a sustainable action plan that could be adapted to other organizations.

Keywords: advancement, alumni, alumni association (s), alumni relationships, communication, community college(s), donations, donors, engagement, fundraising, giving, higher education, recent alumni, student engagement

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Community college enrollment makes up nearly half of all undergraduate degrees earned in the United States. Enrollment for the nearly 1,200 associate degree-granting higher education institutions is more than 12 million students (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2023). This enrollment serves as a pivotal point for many students at the beginning of their postsecondary education. Some students take one or two classes, while others earn a certificate, diploma, or degree and then enter the workforce. Other students continue their education at a 4-year institution with intentions of earning a bachelor's degree. Community colleges serve a wide variety of students and community needs, in curriculum coursework, continuing education, and workforce development. According to AACC (2023), "Community colleges will increasingly be recognized as the gateway to the American dream-the learning resource needed to sustain America's economic viability and productivity" (Vision section).

Community college programs continue to expand and enrollment continues to rise, even though legislative support and budget allotment have dwindled over the past few years (Hall, 2016). In fact, all types of higher education institutions are constantly facing fiscal challenges due to federal and state agency cuts in college and university budgets (Skari, 2014). In order to maintain and grow programs and services, higher education institutions are forced to search for external fundraising resources and opportunities (Skari, 2014). If external resources are unavailable, this creates additional pressure on the institution to raise tuition or introduce additional student fees. Community college alumni associations can help alleviate some of that pressure by

serving as the agent to recruit alumni for institutional support through monetary donations. Unfortunately, while community colleges make up the largest sector of higher education, they actually receive the smallest percentage of all private financial support (Kaplan, 2023). Community colleges lag behind in generating charitable donations for their institutions (Akin, 2005). In particular, community colleges have not mastered the ability to tap into recent graduates as resources and convert those recent alumni into active donors. This study examines why recent alumni of community colleges are not donating to their alma mater.

Consultancy

Unlike theoretical research studies, applied research or action research attempts to solve a problem. In order to research a real-world problem and help find a solution, I was given the task of acting as a consultant with a partnering organization. As a doctoral student in the Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership (DEOL) program at Gardner-Webb University (GWU), I have reviewed numerous case studies in theory, but this was the first opportunity to work as an actual consultant in order to apply all I have learned in the classroom in the real world.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), consultancy means giving professional and expert advice on a subject. Prior to being able to give expert advice, I had to learn more about consultancy work and how to identify a consultancy project. I was given guidelines and advice on how to select a meaningful and research-driven consultancy project. The consultancy project had to have a beginning and an ending. As an acting consultant, I had to develop a consultancy project with a partnering organization and then lead and manage the project from the beginning stages to the end

stage. I reviewed multiple possible consultancy projects, but only one met the approval of my dissertation advisor. The consultancy project was to work with Midsize Suburban Community College (MSCC) in the foothills of North Carolina to identify ways for the college to increase recent graduates' donations to the alumni association. The community college will be referred to using the pseudonym MSCC throughout this dissertation in practice. The alumni association for the college wanted to increase the financial support of recent graduates but needed advice on how to do that. As a consultant, it was my job to conduct the research, develop some type of data collection, analyze the data, and then develop recommendations for the organization. The consultancy-based project was meant to provide students with the opportunity to apply theory to real-world challenges. Working as a consultant and working with a partner allowed me to apply what I learned in the classroom theoretically to the real world as an action researcher.

Organizational Partner

The partner organization, MSCC, is located in the foothills of North Carolina with an enrollment headcount of 3,456 students. The college is one of 58 community colleges that make up the NC Community Colleges system (NCCCS). The mission of NCCCS

is to open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals by providing:

- Education, training, and retraining for the workforce including basic skills and literacy education, occupational and pre-baccalaureate programs.

- Support for economic development through services to and in partnership with

> business and industry and in collaboration with the University of North
> Carolina System and private colleges and universities.
>
> - Services to communities and individuals which improve the quality of life.
>   (NCCCS, 2014, Mission section)

This study includes an analysis of the culture at MSCC, a brief analysis of the alumni association, a survey of alumni, collection of the data, analysis of the data, and research-based recommendations for the alumni association.

MSCC is a unique community college in that it is one of the oldest educational institutions in North Carolina. It did not join NCCCS until 1973, when it transitioned from junior college to community college. Because of that change in status, the college evolved into a different type of learning institution. In the years after the change, the college began to phase out campus housing, school-sanctioned athletic teams were disbanded, and the culture on campus eventually evolved into a traditional community college atmosphere. The alumni association has been fortunate in the past because the junior college graduates have a rich history of being active donors to the alumni association. The alumni from the junior college era are faithful donors of their money to their alma mater. As a result, the MSCC alumni association primarily works with older age alumni, and most of the active alumni association members are graduates of the college when it was a junior college.

Organizational Context

MSCC is located in a county with a population of 28,8444, and the community ranges from very rural to suburban to urban depending on location within the county. MSCC has two campus locations, both in neighboring downtowns, and a site in the

northern end of the county, which is extremely rural, with few individuals' homes and mostly agriculture. The college was originally charted in the 1800s as a private Presbyterian college and went through several major institutional changes and name changes before joining the NCCCS in 1973.

The enrollment headcount for fall 2022 was 3,456 students, and the college employed 546 individuals in either full-time or part-time capacities. The college also serves a great number of alumni and the general public, as the college is a public institution and an open campus, which means it serves the community and the public. The study body consists of students who are enrolled in either curriculum or continuing education courses or both. Curriculum students are mostly female (61%) and primarily part-time (76%). Fifty-nine percent of all students are considered non-degree seeking. Of the students who are part-time, 45% are dually enrolled and take Career & College Promise or Early College courses while in high school. MSCC opened one of North Carolina's first early college high schools in 2004 and has since opened two more early college sites, each serving Grades 9-13. Each early college consists of at least 80% of students who are considered at risk.

White students make up the largest ethnic group at the college at 66%, 10% of students identify as Black and 14% identify as Hispanic. Asian, Native American, and multiracial students are also represented within the student population (NCCCS, 2014). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 19.6% of the town's residents live in poverty.

The MSCC alumni association was established to support and uphold the college and to act for the college and all former students of the college. The alumni association adopted a formal constitution and bylaws that outline the purpose of the association as

well as the qualifications of membership, duties of officers, and governance of the

association. Membership in the alumni association is open to any student who attended

the college, either full-time or part-time, and both current and former faculty and

administration. There are no formal strategic plans currently in place for the alumni

association. The association sets yearly goals and highlights the previous year's

accomplishments. The association has a yearly alumni day event in which all alumni are

invited to the college campus, and a graduating class from the junior college era

celebrates their 50th class reunion. Alumni members make suggestions each year on how

to improve the alumni day event.

Organizational Analysis–MSCC

Culture is described as the way we do things, especially in private when we think

no one is watching. (Denison et al., 2012). Culture is often described as what we value. It

is our beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and even our assumptions; and like an

iceberg, much of our culture is hidden (Schein & Schein, 2017). Culture is learned, and it

sometimes proves to be very difficult to change a culture. In order to partner with the

college, I had to understand the culture at MSCC, which requires an in-depth assessment

of the culture and a full understanding of the undisclosed components within that

organization.

The first step in learning about the organization was to study the organization and

gather data. For this project, I used the Denison Organization Culture Survey (DOCS) to

learn more about the culture at MSCC. This type of survey helps to take a deeper, more

in-depth look at the college to get a complete picture. There are four basic traits in the

survey that measure culture and performance measures. Those traits are mission,

adaptability, involvement, and consistency (Denison et al., 2012). The next four sections

describe the four basic traits of culture and performance measures and explain how

MSCC ranked on each trait. Each section is followed by a chart showing the rank of

MSCC on that particular trait.

Mission

The mission of MSCC states that it is a high-quality, learning-centered,

educational and training program providing students with equitable services and

economic mobility. A mission, also referred to as direction or purpose, provides meaning

and helps to guide goal setting for organizations (Denison et al., 2012). MSCC has a great

mission, and the mission is available on the college's website for everyone to read.

Having a great mission statement alone does not necessarily create a vision for the

institution. A vision is created through the combination and integration of the mission

statement and other guiding statements like a vision statement, a purpose statement, and a

belief statement. The strategic plan and all the statements work together to provide

strategic direction for the college. A good strategic plan is known by all stakeholders.

MSCC has all its important strategic plans (strategic plan, mission statement, vision

statement, purpose statement, and belief statement) posted on the college website and

readily available for viewing by all stakeholders. A clear mission and strategic plans

promoted by institutional leaders provide purpose and meaning (Denison et al., 2012).

MSCC scored the highest in the area of strategic direction and intent. This is due in part

to the revision and reflection process that takes place at MSCC. Revision of the strategic

plan takes place at least every 3-5 years and it is a multi-departmental task. Feedback is

often requested and willingly shared throughout the revision process. Figure 1 shows the

rank of MSCC in relation to mission.

Figure 1

DOCS Survey Results Chart–Mission
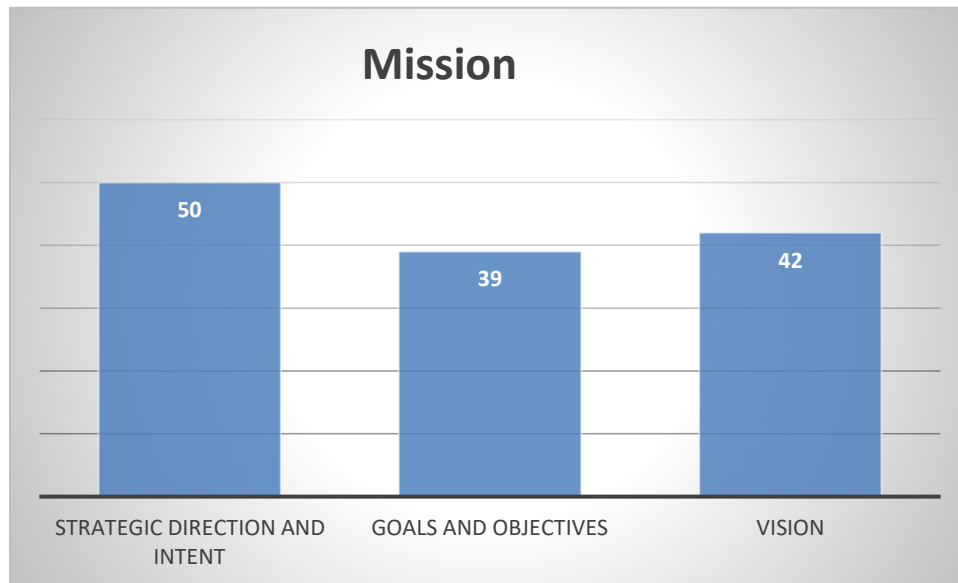
Adaptability

Adaptability refers to how well organizations listen to patterns, trends, and markets in their field. Adaptability is when an organization is able to quickly transition as organizational needs arise (Denison et al., 2012). MSCC scored higher in adaptability overall than in any other component. MSCC is very much student (customer) focused and often utilizes student surveys to guide programs and events as well as create changes in various departments. Students and staff complete an annual survey each year, and those results are shared throughout the institution. Deans and directors who have concerns about certain names or identities that are redacted can request that information from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Those surveys are intended to help guide the next academic year as well as help with employee evaluations if needed. The college is very adaptable because of its ability to adapt to current state-mandated policies and procedures

and because the institution as a whole adapts well to changes constantly facing higher education. Figure 2 depicts the ranking of MSCC on adaptability.

Figure 2

DOCS Survey Results Chart–Adaptability

Adaptability

CREATING CHANGE 53	CUSTOMER FOCUS 65	ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING 61
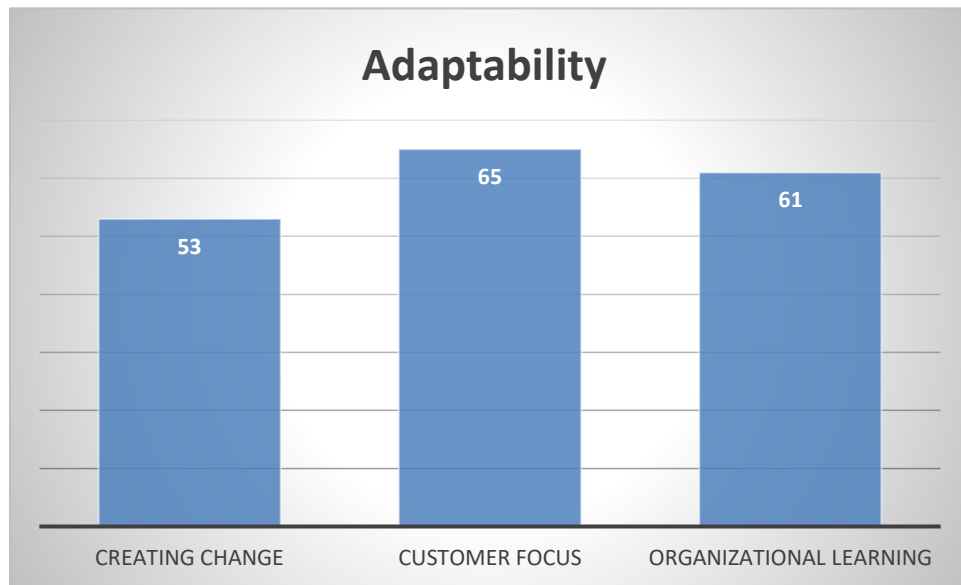
Involvement

Involvement is about organizations that strive to empower and engage their employees so individuals take ownership (Denison et al., 2012). Involvement includes commitment, empowerment, team orientation, and development. MSCC does a fantastic job in the capability development component, as the institution empowers employees by offering free classes, tuition reimbursement, paid conference fees, paid workshops, professional development, and even site visits to other institutions to see best practice scenarios at work. The college reimburses for gas mileage for attendance at all the previously listed events or allows individuals to drive a college car if available. For overnight trips and events, the college pays hotel fees and reimburses for meals. Capability development is the highest overall scored component of the DOCS survey,

and the college ranked so high because of all its endeavors to equip and develop

employees. This reflects how strongly MSCC works to develop capable and credentialed

faculty and staff. Empowerment ranks second in the involvement area, while team

orientation ranks the lowest. Figure 3 depicts the MSCC ranking on involvement.

Figure 3

DOCS Survey Results Chart–Involvement
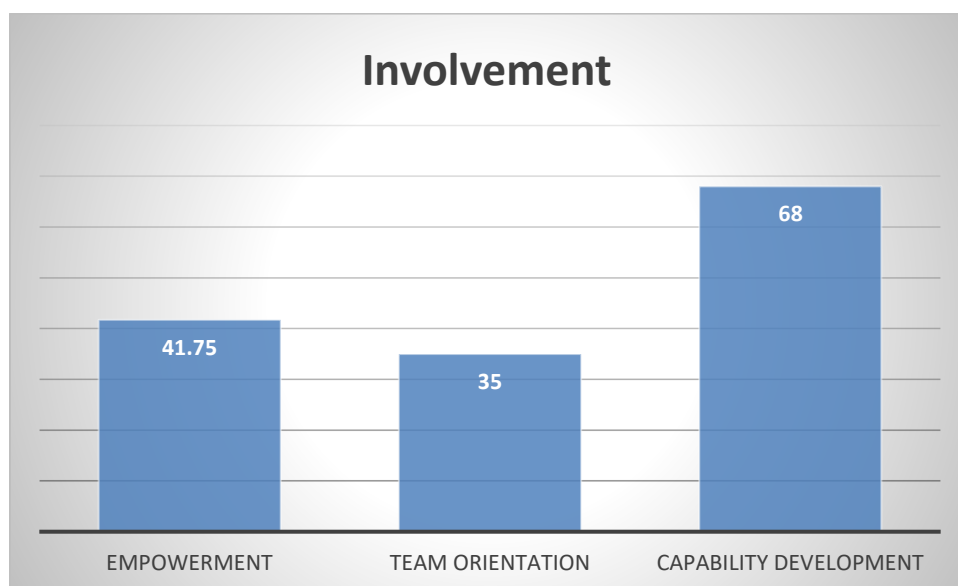
Consistency

      Consistency refers to the systems, structures, processes, policies, orders,

procedures, and actions of an organization (Denison et al., 2012). MSCC has a lot of

processes in place. While some processes need improvement, many processes are

consistent and efficient, which aids in the productivity of employees and reduces

confusion for stakeholders. It is very important for institutions to be ranked well in the

area of consistency as this aids in the understanding between the employer and the

employees as well as the employer and other stakeholders. MSCC scored the highest in

coordination and integration, while it scored the lowest in core values. This is not a

reflection of a lack of core values, but rather a lack of consistency across the institution. If organizations work to improve consistency, efficiency will also improve. Improvement could be achieved through streamlining processes and procedures and by ensuring that policies are up-to-date and current. Figure 4 depicts the MSCC ranking on consistency.

Figure 4

DOCS Survey Results Chart–Consistency
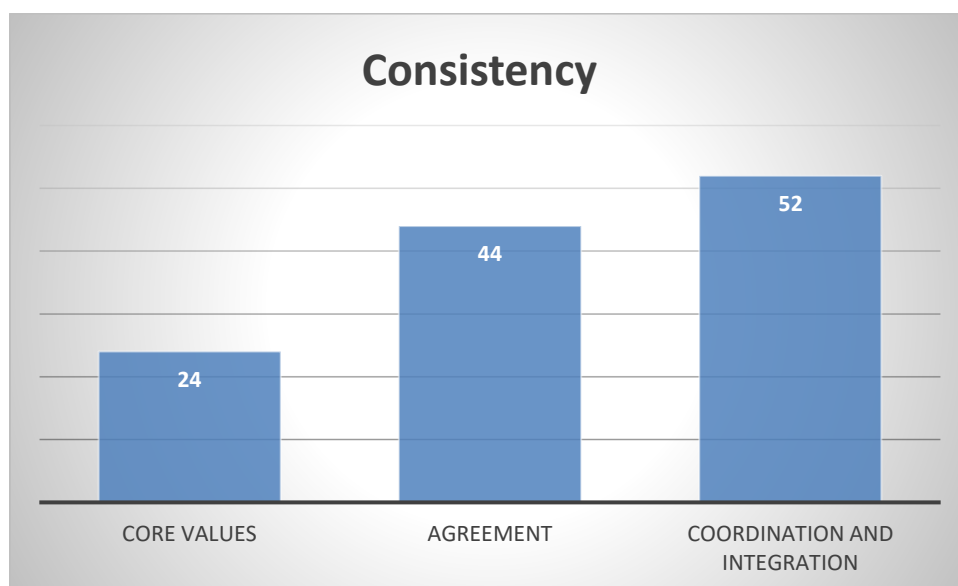
Summary

      The DOCS survey revealed that MSCC has some insignificant areas of improvement in regard to operational core values and team values. These are not detrimental to the ongoing success of the college. The leaders at MSCC play a critical role in defining and supporting the strategic plan, mission, vision, purpose, and beliefs of the college. Leadership at the college has a huge impact on institutional standards, as shown in the DOCS survey results.

Organizational Analysis–Alumni Association

      The organizational analysis for the alumni association provides a brief review of

the alumni association. The review helps to focus on the alumni association, its goals, and

how those goals are achieved. This also helps to reveal what is most important to the

organization and identifies strengths and weaknesses. The process used was simple and

followed the McKinsey 7S Model of identifying and analyzing organizational design.

The McKinsey 7S Model analyzes organizations using seven different elements which

helped me to decipher how the alumni association was set up to function. The seven

elements are strategy, structure, systems, shared values, skills, staff, and style. These

elements can be used to determine organizational effectiveness and/or success (Singh,

2013).

McKinsey 7S Model Results

1. Strategy: The alumni association is structured into one organization that
   focuses on supporting the college.

2. Structure: The alumni association operates under the guidance of its
   constitution and bylaws. Membership is open to all full-time and part-time
   students who attended the college and both current and former faculty and
   administration. The alumni association is run by an executive committee made
   up of the following officers: president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.
   Each position serves a 2-year term of office but may be reelected to succeed
   position. The election of officers for the executive committee is conducted by
   a simple majority vote of the members present at the annual meeting.

3. Systems: In addition to the executive committee, other standing committees
   are the finance committee, publicity committee, and projects committee.
   Members of the standing committees and chairmen of the committees are

appointed by the executive committee. Nominating committees are appointed

as needed by the president at least 60 days prior to annual meetings.

Nominating committees are made up of three individuals who are members of

the alumni association.

4. Shared Values: The alumni association positions itself as an organization that

     works to support the mission of the college and acts for all former students of

     the college.

5. Skills: Qualification for membership is guaranteed through evidence of

     student enrollment or college employment. Executive officers are selected

     through an election process, while other committee members and chairmen

     are appointed.

6. Staff: Members of the association are former students at the college and/or

     former or current college faculty or administration. Staff also includes

     members who serve on the executive committee and other standing

     committees, in addition to any nominating committees.

7. Style: Membership is inclusive as it is guaranteed to all former students and

     former or current faculty or administration. The alumni association is team-

     oriented as evidenced by shared responsibilities between committees. Annual

     meetings are open to all members, and all present members cast votes for

     committee officers.

The McKinsey 7S Model can be used like I did to understand how the alumni

association is currently set up, or this tool can be used to determine the well-being of an

organization. Sometimes, the analysis tool is used to determine the future success of an

organization or to develop a path to get from a current situation to an ideal situation. The model can help identify gaps and inconsistencies in an organization.

Myself as a Leader

Leadership is defined as "the ability to inspire confidence and support among the people who are needed to achieve organizational goals" (Dubrin, 2016, p. 27). A quick internet search of leadership yields a variety of definitions but includes words like motivating, accomplishing, attitude, working together, lead, influence, and guide. The one common denominator that connects these words is relationship. Leadership is relationship-focused; it is not about the individual leader, but instead about the individual and their relationships. Relationships are woven throughout the three keys of leadership:

1. The most effective leaders are always investing in strengths.
2. The most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team.
3. The most effective leaders understand their followers' needs (Rath & Conchie, 2008).

The more I learn about leadership, the more I realize leadership is not about me but about how I lead and how I serve.

The study of leadership is not new, as formal leadership studies began in the 1930s (Martin, 2018). The formal study of leadership and behavioral theory leadership in particular has led to thousands of leadership programs in higher education, leadership institutes, workshops, professional development, and even retreats in the public sector. The concept of behavioral theory leadership is that leadership skills and capability can be taught; therefore, anyone who learns these skills and concepts of

leadership can be a great leader. Almost all modern-day organizations adopt this concept

and some form of behavioral leadership theory, as proven by the amount of money and

time companies spend training their leaders and workers to advance in their field of

study. Leadership has evolved into a multidisciplinary field, and new leadership studies

continue to develop. Prior to behavioral leadership becoming popular, Henry Ford and

early Detroit automakers adopted this belief and were driven to maximize profit through

the use of new mechanical technologies (Dickmann & Stanford-Blair, 2002). Behavioral

theory leadership adheres to the belief that great leaders are made, not simply born. While

this dissertation in practice is not a leadership study, this part of the project helped to

determine my leadership skills, strengths, and weaknesses, necessary for leading a

consultancy-based project. Prior to beginning this project, I participated in multiple

evaluations of my leadership qualities and abilities. The results are listed in this section.

Leadership Research Findings, Practice, and Skills

On the Self-Assessment Quiz 13-1, I scored 57. A score of 57 revealed that I

think strategically. This score means that I am equipped and able to provide strategic

leadership help to other individuals (Dubrin, 2016).

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership

The Maxwell (2007) self-evaluation assessment listed the following five laws as

my strengths: Law of Influence, Law of Addition, Law of Empowerment, Law of

Victory, and Law of the Big Mo. This shows that I am relationship-centered. Three laws

were rated as my weaknesses: Law of the Picture, Law of Priorities, and Law of

Explosive Growth. The majority of the laws, 13 total, were rated as growth. These are the

areas that it recommended I target for growth: Law of the Lid, Law of Process, Law of

Navigation, Law of Solid Ground, Law of Respect, Law of Intuition, Law of Magnetism,

Law of Connection, Law of Inner Circle, Law of Buy-In, Law of Sacrifice, Law of

Timing, and Law of Legacy (Maxwell, 2007).

Everything DiSC

On the Workplace Assessment DiSC Style, I was rated an "i". According to the

DiSC Workplace Assessment, my DiSC style, "i" stands for influence. I was almost

exactly in the middle of the "i" area, which means my priorities are enthusiasm, taking

action, and encouraging collaboration. I am always looking for ways to collaborate with

other departments and divisions. I have actually written and was awarded a grant titled

Collaborative Spaces in which we were able to create multiple collaborative spaces

within my building for various patron groups. My strong traits and strengths are

outgoing, enthusiastic, optimistic, high-spirited, and lively. This assessment confirmed

that I am relationship-driven and I enjoy relating to people. It stated that I am passionate

and most people probably find my enthusiasm contagious, but it can sometimes come

across as overly optimistic. I need to be aware that my outgoing personality can

sometimes take over and monopolize the conversation. I love to collaborate, and this

assessment revealed that sometimes individuals require more personal space than I

realize while collaborating. This assessment exposed that I am reluctant to give negative

feedback, even if given constructively, as individuals sometimes take that feedback the

wrong way. I am known to happily embrace change, so it was no surprise that this

assessment stated that I easily accept new people and new ideas and I tackle new projects

with confidence. According to this assessment, I fear rejection, isolation, and being

ignored. The "i" style individual is sometimes limited by impulsiveness, disorganization,

and lack of follow-through (Wiley, 2012).

360° Self-Stir Assessment

The 360° assessment taken by me, my peers, and coworkers confirmed what the DISC assessment did in several areas. It stated that I accepted change and uncertainty. It also showed how much of a social person I am by emphasizing that I feel the joy and pain of others, I go out of my way to help and support others, and I do not discriminate when dealing with individuals. My bottom five traits revealed areas in which I need to improve. It showed that I am not always aware of how my actions and behaviors impact others and that I have some blind spots I need to work on, which I can do by asking for feedback and constructive criticism. I need to work on developing individuals within my team, creating a clear vision, and communicating that vision (Maxwell, 2007).

Strengths

The various leadership assessments revealed a number of my strengths. This section lists each strength, summarizes each strength, and includes which assessment was used to identify the strength.

1. Strategic Thinker (Dubrin Quiz 13-1): I tend to think long-term and am always planning ahead.

2. Outgoing and Enthusiastic (DiSC): This is definitely a strength of mine as shown in the DiSC assessment and in comments individuals often make about my personality at work and in social settings.

3. Value Collaboration (DiSC): I value collaboration, especially at work, and am always looking for ways to collaborate with other areas.

4. Helpful and Supportive (360°): I was ranked high by my peers in this area,

and The Law of Addition (Maxwell, 2007) is one of my strengths, which is about being helpful and serving and supporting others.

5. Accept Change and Uncertainty (360°): Change is inevitable, so I tend to embrace change and make the most of changes that come my way.

Weaknesses

The various leadership assessments revealed a number of weaknesses. This section lists each weakness, summarizes each weakness, and includes which assessment was used to identify the weakness.

1. Disorganized (DiSC): I have had to work at this in order to learn to be organized in both my personal life and professional life.

2. Giving people unpleasant feedback and being forceful or insistent with others (DiSC): Honest feedback is a way to show support to my team members. A healthy working group will sometimes require negative feedback. A healthy working group is not free from disagreements and conflicts, but it can be healthy and respectful with conflict and feedback, which can then grow the team.

3. Does not set or communicate a clear vision or direction for others or purpose (360°): This relates back to communication. Oftentimes, there is a vision, but maybe it is not communicated clearly. Sometimes a team has to deviate from the original vision due to external or internal changes.

4. Self-awareness/not aware of actions' and behaviors' impact on others (360°): This relates to Emotional Intelligence (EQ). I am aware that I need to be more conscientious of how my actions impact others.

5. Does not ask for feedback (360°): This relates to communication and EQ, as it is somewhat uncomfortable for me to ask individuals for feedback about how I am doing. Feedback can be very beneficial to leaders and can help leaders learn from their team, direct reports, coworkers, and supervisors.

Leadership Theories

Transformational leadership resonates with me and my style of leadership. "A transformational leader is one who brings about positive, major changes in an organization" (Dubrin, 2016, p. 77). Another leadership style that really resonates with me is servant leadership, which basically means I serve others through the leadership position rather than taking an assertive, dominating approach to leadership. A servant leader interacts with their team and takes their ideas, suggestions, complaints, etc., into consideration when making decisions. The greater good is prioritized over leadership needs or wants. The Law of Addition, which is one of my strengths, states that "leaders add value by serving others" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 47). I firmly believe that it is my duty to serve others in my profession. Evidence is in the work I do daily when I stop what I am doing to help others, even if it means staying late or not getting a certain task done immediately. Evidence is also in all the major changes that have taken place in the department I supervise. Major changes in the department, initiated by me, have allowed us to increase the quality of services we offer.

Strategies

One of my strategies to become a more effective and successful leader is to work on the laws that I was ranked GROWTH on when I took *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* self-evaluation. According to the assessment, those 13 GROWTH laws have

the potential to become a STRENGTH for me if I focus on them rather than the ones ranked WEAKNESS. I should hire and collaborate with folks who are strong in my weak areas to balance the team.

Another strategy is to work on raising my EQ score, especially in the area of self-awareness and how my actions and behaviors impact others. By raising my EQ score, I would be better equipped to read the emotions of others.

Another strategy for becoming a better leader is to improve my communication skills, which would help improve several of my weaknesses. For example, communicating a clear vision, asking for feedback, giving people unpleasant feedback, and being forceful when needed are all clearly related to communication. These areas could improve as good, effective communication skills also improve.

Action Steps

The first action step was to improve my EQ since EQ has a significant impact on professional success. EQ is "the single biggest predictor of performance in the workplace and the strongest driver of leadership and personal excellence" (Bradberry et al., 2009, p. 21). Fortunately, individuals can improve their EQ scores, and an increase in EQ would benefit individuals from all walks of life and in all areas of their lives, not just professionally. One of my action steps is to increase my EQ score through the implementation and repeated practice of some of the 66 strategies presented in the book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* (Bradberry et al., 2009). I plan to focus on self-awareness and how my actions and behaviors impact other individuals. I also plan to learn more about emotional triggers and the five core emotions listed in the book. I think it would be helpful to learn how to successfully identify my emotions as they happen, as only 36% of

people tested in the book can accurately identify emotions (Bradberry et al., 2009).

Reading supplemental books and/or articles on all these topics, in addition to Bradberry

et al.'s (2009) book, will help to increase my EQ.

Another action step to becoming a better leader is to improve my overall

communication skills by attending workshops and professional development on effective

communication. Oral communication would be improved, as well as unspoken

communication such as body language and cues. In addition to reading books on this

topic, attendance at webinars and online tutorials would be useful as well.

Professional Leadership Development Plan

As a result of the evaluation, I developed a Professional Leadership Development

Plan (PDLP). The timeline for my PLDP is 6 months to 5 years. The PDLP is divided

into three sections. The first section, Table 1, is my current state of leadership

development. The second section of the PDLP, Table 2, is my desired state of leadership

development. Table 1 and Table 2 are both based on the assessment results taken in

preparation to lead this project and study. They take into account my leadership strengths,

weaknesses, and needs identified in prior assessments. The third section of the PDLP,

Table 3, is my action plan for personal leadership development, which serves as an actual

road map to improve my leadership abilities. Improving communication and increasing

my EQ will be the first steps and will be achieved early on in the plan, both within the

first year of implementation. Earning my doctorate, an EdD in Organizational

Leadership, is another step and will be achieved within 3 years of the plan. The last goal

in my plan is to advance in my career within 3 to 5 years, which is more of a long-term

goal. By completing the PDLP, I was able to pinpoint opportunities to build on strengths,

improve weaknesses, and identify needs for my own growth and advancement as a

leader.

Table 1

PDLP-My Current State

Leadership strengths	Leadership weaknesses	Common feedbacks
- Strategic Thinker-Dubrin Quiz 13-1 - The Law of Influence-Maxwell - The Law of Addition-Maxwell - The Law of Empowerment-Maxwell - The Law of Victory-Maxwell - The Law of the Big Mo-Maxwell - Outgoing-DiSC - Enthusiastic-DiSC - Optimistic-DiSC - High-spirited-DiSC - Lively-DiSC - Value Collaboration-DiSC - Empathetic-360° - Do not discriminate-360° - See Myself for Who I am-360° - Helpful-360° - Supportive-360° - Accept Change & Uncertainty-360°	- The Law of the Picture-Maxwell - The Law of Priorities-Maxwell - The Law of Explosive Growth-Maxwell - Routine work-DiSC - Giving people unpleasant feedback-DiSC - Being forceful or insistent with others-DiSC - Performing routine or systematic tasks-DiSC - Undertaking detailed analyses-DiSC - Disorganized-DiSC - Lack of follow through-DiSC - Blind spots-360° - Doesn't ask for feedback-360° - Doesn't set a clear vision or direction for others-360° - Not aware of actions & behavior impact on others-360° - Doesn't clearly communicate vision & core purpose-360°	- Strategic thinker-I scored a 57 on the Leadership Self-Assessment Quiz 13-1 in the Dubrin text. - Relationship centered & collaborative- The 21 Laws of Leadership Self-Evaluation and the DiSC assessment - Open to change, new people, new ideas, and new projects-The DiSC assessment and the 360° feedback - Need to improve communication

Table 2

PDLP-My Desired State

Leadership development needs	Rationale
• The Law of the Lid-Maxwell • The Law of Process-Maxwell • The Law of Navigation-Maxwell • The Law of Solid Ground-Maxwell • The Law of Respect-Maxwell • The Law of Intuition-Maxwell • The Law of Magnetism-Maxwell • The Law of Connection-Maxwell • The Law of the Inner Circle-Maxwell • The Law of Buy-In-Maxwell • The Law of Sacrifice-Maxwell • The Law of Timing-Maxwell • The Law of Legacy-Maxwell • Take care to get things right the first time-DiSC • Avoid monopolizing the conversation-DiSC • Give others time to process my message-DiSC • Increase Self-Awareness-360° • Take Time to Build Effective Teams-360° • Set & Communicate Clear Vision & Purpose-360°	• I choose Maxwell's Laws that I scored growth on as the items that I need to develop. The assessment stated that I have the potential to make these laws strengths and to target these laws for growth. • The DISC assessment suggested that I slow down and do things differently by taking time to get things correct the first time, avoiding monopolizing the conversations, and giving others time to process things. • The 360 degree feedback that I received from my peers and co-workers made it clear that I need to have more self-awareness and understand how my actions and behaviors impact others. I also learned that I need to take the time to build effective teams by empowering, motivating, and developing others. I realized that I was not communicating a clear vision & purpose with my team. • If I improve, work on, and develop the needs highlighted in my assessments, it will help to make me a better, more effective leader in my workplace and contribute to my overall success as a leader. If I work to become a better communicator, then peers and coworkers will know how much I appreciate and advocate for them.

Table 3

PDLP-My Action Plan

Goals	Objectives	Resources	Timeline
1. Improve communication skills	1. Read books on communication 2. Attend workshops on communication 3. Serve on various committees	CCLINC (Community College Libraries in North Carolina), Community College, Books, Workshops, VLC (Virtual Learning Community)	6 months to 1 year
2. Increase emotional intelligence	1. Read books on EQ 2. Practice strategies 3. Pre & ost EQ test	Emotional Intelligence 2.0, Supplemental books, Articles, Professional Journals, EQ assessments, Videos, PD	6 months to 1 year
3. Earn an EDD from an accredited university in organizational leadership	1. Attend all classes 2. Complete all assignments 3. Complete consultancy project	Gardner-Webb Library resources (print & electronic), Community College, Husband & family support, Cohort support	3 years
4. Advance in my career to dean, executive director, VP, or consultancy position	1. Complete an EdD program 2. Serve on President's Council 3. Complete community college professional development series	NCCCS (NC Community College System), NCCCLA (North Carolina Community College Library Association), mentors	3 to 5 years

Reflection

A thorough self and peer leadership examination proved to be extremely helpful. It helped me to examine my individual leadership style more closely, by identifying strengths and weaknesses in the area of leadership. This exercise challenged me as a leader toward self-examination and development. This type of exercise takes a commitment to be transparent and a willingness to transform leadership style and ability.

Because of this part of the project, I now have goals and objectives for myself in the area of leadership development. Completing a PLDP prior to the start of the consultancy project helped me to be a better leader. This part of the study forced me to look for strategies to improve my leadership ability, which benefited my consultancy project. As I became a better leader, I also strengthened my overall study, consultancy project, and partnership experience.

Myself as a Project Manager

In order to lead a consultancy project and a study, not in theory but in practice, I must be a good project manager. To learn more about my skills as a project manager, I first had to evaluate my project manager skills, which are different than leadership abilities. In the beginning stages of this project, I attempted to evaluate my project manager skills, with the end goal of successfully leading the upcoming consultancy project. The Characteristics of a Project Manager Assessment evaluates potential project managers in the following five areas: leadership, communication, creative thinking and problem-solving, dealing with uncertainty, and planning. I took the assessment with a real scenario in mind in which I was given the task of leading individuals toward a common goal. My results showed that I scored relatively high in both the leadership and creative thinking and problem-solving categories. In regard to leadership, I scored higher than typical project managers. My score was over 85%, while typical project managers scored around 75%. In the area of creative thinking and problem-solving, I scored around 75%, while typical project managers scored roughly 70%. Based on my responses, Figure 5 shows three areas (communication, dealing with uncertainty, planning) in which I need to improve, as compared to typical project managers.

Figure 5

Characteristics of a Project Manager Results

Characteristics of a Project Manager

Typical Project Manager
Your Results

Leadership
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%

Planning

Communication

Dealing with
uncertainty

Creative thinking
and problem-solving
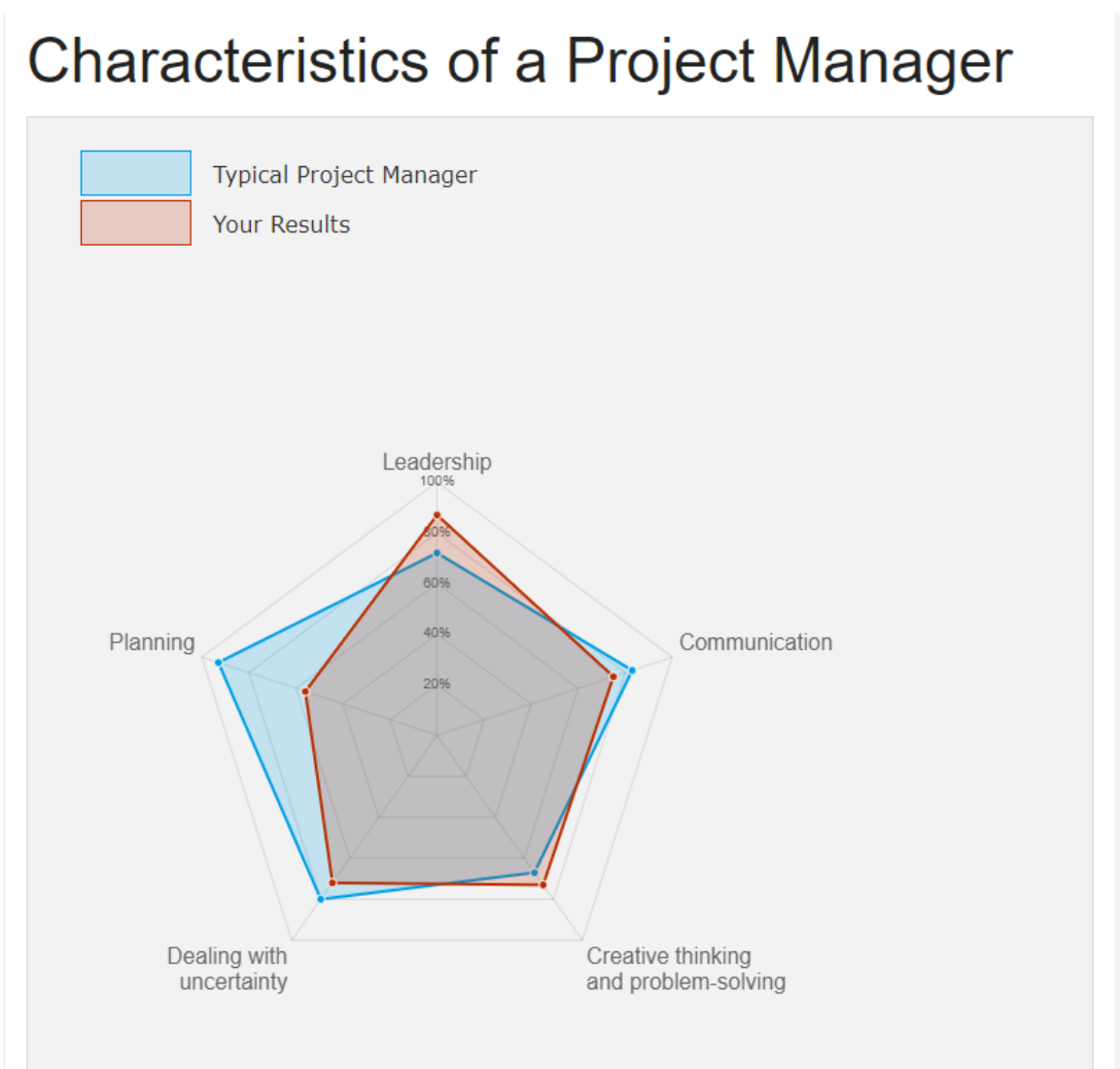
Project Manager Assessment Results–Communication

According to my results, I scored about 75% in the area of communication, while

typical project managers scored a little more than 80%. This is not a huge difference, but

there is room for improvement, which would help me in any type of leadership position,

especially with a consultancy project. The five types of communication are verbal

communication, nonverbal communication, written communication, listening, and visual

communication. This includes formal and informal communication such as email, text, face-to-face, nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and body language, and presentations. To be an effective project manager in group situations, one must be a good communicator and set good examples. One must be able to accept feedback from the group or team without taking things personally. Poor communication or little to no communication can hinder any type of project and it can cripple a team from getting anything done. I will continue to improve in this area as I tackle new leadership positions. I will also improve my listening skills and nonverbal skills in order to be a better leader. By improving my overall communication score, I will become a more efficient and effective leader.

Project Manager Assessment Results–Dealing With Uncertainty

Dealing with uncertainty is another area of improvement. I scored around 75%, while typical project managers scored about 80%. There is not a huge difference between my score and typical project managers, but there is definitely room for improvement. Dealing with uncertainty is an important skill for project managers, as possible projects and possible problems related to the projects are always on the horizon. As special projects or even day-to-day tasks are handled, things may pop up unexpectedly, and project managers and leaders need to be equipped to deal with and maneuver the unexpected.

Project Manager Assessment Results–Planning

Planning is the area where I scored the lowest and need the most improvement. I scored around 59%, while typical project managers scored over 90% in planning. Since planning is the core activity in the early stages of a project, it is basically the foundation

of all projects. It is essential to have a solid, well-planned blueprint for projects to be successful. This makes it extremely important that I improve in the area of planning.

Summary

My results did not necessarily surprise me. I did not line up exactly with the graphic of a typical project manager. Even though I scored high in leadership and creative thinking and problem-solving, there is always room for improvement. As a leader and project manager, I will look for ways to improve and enhance my skills in all areas. My focus will be to improve communication, dealing with uncertainty, and planning. By improving these areas, I will become a more confident, more efficient, more effective, and better-equipped leader, researcher, and project manager.

It is always good practice to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of oneself as the leader and project manager. It is also a good practice to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of team members. There are always roles within a group that some individuals naturally gravitate toward and adopt without realizing it. People tend to like to stay in their comfort zones. It sometimes takes a strong leader and good project manager to push individuals into areas where they are not comfortable, or naturally able to do, which will then usually force the individuals to grow and stretch their own abilities. Almost anyone can manage a team or a project, but a true leader leads and creates relationships and followership, which inspires others to take direction, work as a team, and deliver on expectations (McCallum, 2013). The end goal of examining my leadership and project management abilities prior to beginning the consultancy project was to be able to improve in certain areas so I could successfully lead the consultancy project.

Significant Challenge

The MSCC alumni association is facing significant challenges in relation to alumni fundraising in the near future. Throughout the years, the college has seen a great number of alumni donations, primarily from older alumni, but not necessarily from recent graduates. Older alumni make up the largest percentage of giving, with fewer recent alumni contributing monetary donations to support the alumni association. The alumni association is entering a new era of challenges as the year 2023 will usher in a new phase of institutional history and this could have a major impact on future fundraising efforts. The year 2022 was the last 50th anniversary year of graduates from the college when it was a junior college. Alumni who graduated from the institution when it was a junior college have proven to be the college's biggest donors. That era is slowly coming to an end, and the long-standing traditions of how funds are solicited may need to change in order for the association to be able to continue to support the mission of the college. Graduates from the institution since becoming a community college are not donating like the junior college graduates. The alumni association would like to increase the number of recent alumni who fiscally support the college. The alumni association would like to expand the number of recent alumni donors and increase the donation amounts from recent alumni. The significant challenge in this study is to discover why recent community college graduates are not making donations to their alma mater's alumni association.

Research Question

The following research question will guide the undertaking of action, evidenced-based research throughout the course of this study: "Why are recent community college

alumni not donating money to their alma mater?"

Summary

Community colleges educate over 12 million students by providing certificates, diplomas, degrees, short-term workforce training, and continuing education. One would argue that the students benefiting from community colleges would be a great resource for the college upon completion of their studies; however, it appears that community colleges are lacking in alumni support and monetary donations. Many community college alumni associations struggle to convince alumni to donate to their cause. This dissertation in practice is meant for any community college that may want to examine why alumni are not giving. The information could also benefit universities, although many 4-year higher education institutions are able to create and maintain a successful alumni association with alumni who give. Throughout this dissertation in practice, I will attempt to find out why recent community college alumni are not donating money to their alma mater.

The following four chapters will address the research question of this study and how the consultancy partnership was conducted, including the data-gathering process. The literature review in Chapter 2 explores the scholarly literature on this topic, research gaps, and possible research topics for future similar studies. Chapter 2 also details the theoretical framework selected for this study. Chapter 3 explains the methodology that was selected that best fits this study. Chapter 4 highlights the results of the data collection, including the mode of the quantitative questions and the themes of the qualitative questions. Chapter 5 includes recommendations and an action plan for the partnering organization based on the literature review and the results of the study. My hope in doing this study is that it will benefit as many colleges as possible and that

community college alumni associations in particular will learn how to increase donor support from recent alumni.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are used throughout this study.

Advancement Office

The department of my partnering organization, which includes the Endowment for Excellence, fundraising, planned giving, alumni relations, and community outreach.

Alumni

Graduates of the partnering community college; however, it is important to note that the partnering organization normally defines alumni as any former student who took any single course or class, with the purpose of earning a certificate, diploma, or degree, or with the intent to improve skills in continuing education or curriculum.

Alumni Association

An alumni group open to both full-time and part-time former students and current or former employees of the college.

Community College

A higher education public institution offering certificate, diploma, or degree-seeking students a 2-year program of study and/or continuing education and workforce development.

Consultant

I am the acting consultant on this project. I am also the project manager, DEOL student researcher, and doctoral candidate.

Crowdfunding

Raising small amounts of money from a large crowd (Cho et al., 2019).

Engagement

An individual alumni's participation in alumni association events, such as attendance at meetings or alumni day activities.

Followership

Creating a relationship between the leader and the follower and how they interact (Kellerman 2019).

Friend-raising

Purpose of friend-raising is not necessarily to raise funds but to raise friends who understand the benefits the college provides to the community (Akin, 2005).

Generation

A group of individuals who share something in common. In this study, the common element is graduation years within 10 years.

Higher Education

Refers to any postsecondary educational institution, including 4-year universities and 2-year community colleges.

Partnering Organization

An organization that agrees to allow a DEOL doctoral candidate to act as a consultant for their organization. In this study, the partner organization is the MSCC alumni association.

Project Host

Executive director of advancement and leader of partnering organization.

Recent Alumni

Any alumni who graduated from the partnering community college within the last 10 years, from 2012-2021, sometimes referred to as young alumni.

Social Media

Any type of media format or app individuals use to connect with other individuals electronically, such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, or YouTube.

Stakeholders

Students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the community.

Successful Alumni Association

Associations in which alumni are actively engaged and contributing to the alumni association of their alma mater through regular participation and regular monetary support.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter 2 introduces the research process used throughout the entirety of this study, beginning with pre-research assessments of possible research topics and how the final topic was selected. Key components and factors related to the study such as the project scope, a schedule, resources, budgeting, risks assessments, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are included in this chapter followed by a thorough literature review section. The literature review section has been designed to determine why recent community college alumni do not donate monetarily to the alumni association upon graduation. Research includes studies that analyze the unique challenges facing community colleges in relation to alumni donations. For the practical purpose of comparison of successful alumni programs, and due to the high success rate of alumni programs at 4-year institutions, some of the literature focused on university-level alumni programs. Gaps in literature and suggestions for additional research are also included in Chapter 2.

Peer-reviewed professional journals and scholarly articles were selected using library databases. Previously published dissertations located using library databases were reviewed and included if applicable to the study. Print sources were selected based on subject matter expert authors. Information from websites was included if they were a part of the partner organization and/or system-level reporting. Non-scholarly articles, blogs, and abstract-only articles were deselected, removed from the study, and not included in the research. Key search words and phrases were primarily limited to alumni, alumni associations, alumni donors, alumni engagement, and fundraising efforts at higher

education institutions, with a focus on community colleges. The research question about the lack of monetary support from recent community college graduates helped to narrow down the focus of the study on alumni giving which guided the literature review process. The theoretical framework approach used in this study is reviewed in the final section of Chapter 2.

Research Process

In the beginning stages of the research process, it was important to assess possible projects to determine if the study was worthwhile. Prior to beginning the actual literature review portion of the study, I evaluated a minimum of three to five potential projects using a set of questions titled *Is This a Project* provided to doctoral students enrolled in the DEOL program at GWU. The questions basically served as the first assessment of potential projects. The questions helped to determine if the project should advance to the next step of assessments, all of which needed to be completed for a project to meet the criteria of a research topic for my dissertation in practice. The final step in determining my dissertation topic was to collaborate with my dissertation advisor.

Is This a Project Assessment

The following questions make up the initial assessment to determine if the project is viable to become a study. Initial answers to the questions are included, but some of the initial answers may not reflect what was actually done after the project officially began. For example, I hoped to complete the project by December 2022, but that did not happen. The project's estimated end was moved to January 2023 during the planning stages, but the actual project ended in early February 2023, when I met with the project host to deliver recommendations and an action plan.

- *Does the activity have a start and finish date? Explain.*

  Yes, the schedule follows that of the DEOL program. I originally started brainstorming and planning in December 2021 but did not settle on an exact project until the spring 2022 semester during DEOL 738. I hope to finish the project during the fall 2022 semester so the finish date would be December 2022.

- *Do you know the specific problem you need to solve? Explain.*

  Yes, I am working with the MSCC alumni association, and the specific problem is how to get recent alumni to give money.

- *What specific resources have been committed that you can use to complete the activity? Include monetary and human resources allocated.*

  Human resources from GWU and the MSCC alumni association have been committed. I have access to email lists and alumni information as well as the alumni records in regard to giving, graduation date, etc.

- *Are there tasks that need to be achieved within a particular timeframe for the organization? Explain.*

  No specific timeframes from the organization are identified at this point, but I do have academic timeframes from GWU in order to stay on track and complete the consultancy on time.

- *Are you responsible for coordinating the tasks? Explain.*

  Yes, I am responsible for the entire project. I am creating the surveys, sending the surveys out, collecting the data, organizing and analyzing the results and findings, and writing recommendations.

- ***Can you develop and demonstrate leadership skills in managing this***

  project? How? Yes, I can demonstrate leadership skills in managing this

  project by developing and coordinating the quantitative and qualitative

  surveys as well as analyzing the data and survey results in order to make

  recommendations to the organization.

- ***Do you need help from others to complete the activity? Who?***

  Yes, I need help from the Alumni Office. I need the emails of all MSCC

  recent alumni and access to relevant information. I also need help from my

  dissertation advisor as I advance through this project over the next year. I also

  need help and support from family, friends, and my cohort.

These questions encouraged me to look at potential projects through a different

lens. These questions made me see the bigger picture and consider the whole scope of the

project. It was the first time I took into account who I would need help from, exactly

what I would be doing, and how long the project might take. Prior to completing the

questionnaire, I simply spoke to potential partners and tried to build rapport and gauge if

the partnership would be a good fit, a good learning experience, and a good research

study.

Project Impact, Complexity, and Strength Assessment

After completing the *Is This a Project* questions, I completed the remainder of the

assessments provided by GWU faculty to help determine if this project was an

appropriate topic for my dissertation in practice. The second round of assessments helped

to carefully analyze potential projects using three different ranking tools. These three

assessments were utilized in order-like steps and were completed before beginning any

actual research on the subject. The first one determined the project's overall impact. This

helped determine if the study was worthwhile based on the project's level of impact. This

project scored 15 of 15 on the Project Impact Assessment which means the project has a

very significant impact. This assessment helped determine that the study should continue.

Because this project ranked the highest impact with a quick return on investment, the

project was then evaluated using the next assessment step. Projects that scored low and

had little to no impact were abandoned, and there was no need to perform the next set of

assessments on those projects. There were three components ranked in this assessment,

and the scores ranged from 0 to 5. My project ranked 5 on all three components. Results

of the impact assessment are found in Table 4. The ranking of my project is highlighted

in yellow in Table 4.

Table 4

Project Impact Assessment Matrix

Criteria	Score 0	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3	Score 4	Score 5
Strategic contribution	None	Contributes indirectly to the org. mission	Contributes indirectly to >1 strategic themes	Contributes directly to 1 strategic theme	Contributes directly to >1 strategic theme	Very significant strategic impact
Return on investment	>5 years	4-5 years	3-4 years	2-3 years	1-2 years	<1 year
Operational effectiveness	None	Improves work of a small group of staff < 6	Improves work of a large team of staff > 5	Improves work of whole department	Some improvement across whole organization	Significant improvement across whole organization

After determining the impact of my proposed project, I then advanced to the next

step in the three series of assessments. The next step of assessments determined the

complexity of the project. This is an important step because the complexity score can help determine how much time needs to be allocated for the project and identifies the stakeholders for the project. This assessment forced me to consider various components of the project that I had not previously considered. I had to take into account how to proceed should the project be attempted. My proposed project scored 16 out of 24 for the overall complexity of the project. There were six variables that determined the score. My project scored the highest score (4) on two of the variables, and the lowest (1) on two other variables. The results are in Table 5. The ranking of my project is highlighted in yellow.

Table 5

Project Complexity Matrix

Criteria	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3	Score 4
Delivery timescale (months) 10%	1-6	6-12	12-18	> 18
Stakeholders 20%	Internal and within single organizational area	Internal across more than one business area	Mainly external	Internal and external
Operational change 15%	Very minimal	Some new processes and possibly some re-training	Significant restructure of processes and work areas	Major change/large-scale restructure, outsourcing
Contract complexity 20%	No new contracts required	Single contract with known supplier	Multiple contracts with known suppliers	Contract(s) with new suppliers(s)
In-house expertise 20%	Have done this before many times	Have done this before once or twice	Have done similar before, but not the same	Have not done anything like this before
Dependencies 15%	Very minimal links with other projects	Links with other projects but little impact	Links with other projects upon which this project depends	Other projects depend upon this project

After determining both the impact and the complexity of the project, I was then able to determine how the project would be ranked using the last step of the assessments provided by GWU faculty. In order to determine how the project ranked, I had to mark the intersection of my project impact score (15) and my project complexity score (16) on a matrix (Figure 6). This provided a strength ranking for the project. Rankings are not a project, minor project, medium project, or major project as seen on the key below Figure 6. The project is ranked 15 for impact and 16 for complexity, which gave it a rank of 15/16. According to the intersection marked with an X for the rank of 15/16, the rank lands in the color blue, which means it is considered to be a major project.

Figure 6

Project Strength Matrix

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
24																
23																
22																
21																
20																
19																
18																
17																
16																X
15																
14																
13																
12																
11																
10																
9																
8																
7																
6																
5																
4																
3																
2																
1																

Complexity (y-axis) / Impact (x-axis)
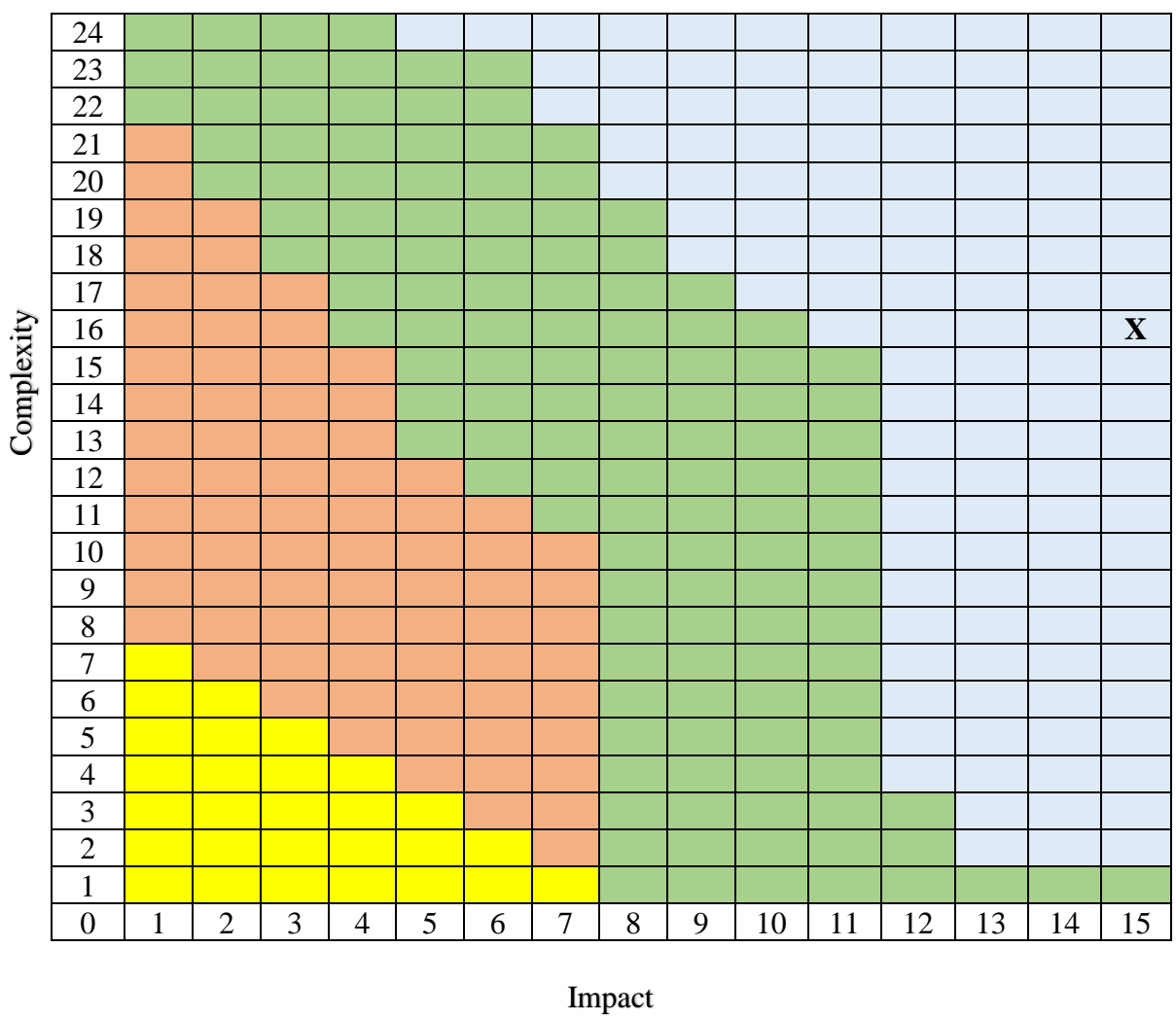
Note. The key for Figure 6

(yellow)	Not a Project
(orange)	Minor Project
(green)	Medium Project
(blue)	Major Project

After it was determined that the project was a major project, that it was worthwhile, significant, impactful, and complex, I determined that the project should continue. I then summarized the importance of the project and evaluated the scope of the

project.

Project Significance

This project is important because of the potential impact it could have on current, future, and former students, and the impact on the college as a whole. The project impacts the financial stability of the college as related to fundraising efforts. The project is noteworthy in how it impacts the college's strategic plan and how the college is able to implement its mission, vision, and goals of the college. The project is of great importance in the area of alumni relationships and the future of the alumni association. This study is relevant as it impacts the local community, its citizens, and various industries surrounding the college and throughout the local county. This study is consequential to other North Carolina community colleges or any community college throughout the nation dealing with fundraising efforts and a lack of alumni monetary support. This project could also be impactful at private colleges and public 4-year universities in the United States and beyond. The reach of this project is extensive and hard to measure because of the extensive potential of the study. This project is significant because of the sheer magnitude by which colleges of all types and sizes and in all locations have to tackle fundraising efforts. The project could also be adapted to impact other nonprofit organizations, such as camps and programs, and other types of learning institutions, such as K-12 charter schools and private schools. This study is necessary because it helps institutions of all types and sizes take advantage of untapped potential and build a strong donor base. This dissertation in practice could have far-reaching impact if other organizations adopt the same type of study or adapt and implement this study in their organization.

Project Scope

   The project scope is basically the outline of how to proceed with the project now that it has passed all the assessments and qualifies as a project for the dissertation in practice. This section includes a project schedule, or an approximate timeline for the project. The schedule, or timeline, basically served as the project plan. The schedule includes who is responsible for each task or item that had to be accomplished and when each item had to be completed. I also identified project resources and budget restraints and assessed possible risk factors associated with the project.

Project Schedule

   This project was projected to take approximately 1 year from start to completion, and it officially began in March 2022. The schedule includes all tasks from the beginning planning stages to the end when recommendations are shared with the partnering organization. The partnering organization's project host was responsible for providing a 2019 alumni survey and survey results from an advancement office survey previously sent to all alumni. The project host emailed me the alumni association's constitution, which included bylaws, to help me understand how the association operates. The project host sent me recent alumni email addresses from the last 10 years, covering the time span of 2012-2021, so I could send a survey to those specific alumni. The alumni were responsible for filling out the survey questions within a given timeframe.

   The schedule helped me to stay on track and aware of when things needed to be completed. The schedule proved to be a valuable project management tool for this study. The project schedule is shown in Table 6. The yellow highlighted items are things I, as the project manager, was responsible for completing. As shown, I was responsible for

most of the tasks on the project schedule.

Table 6

Project Schedule

Task	Responsible party	Estimated date
Plan and brainstorm	Project manager	March 2022
Identify an organization	Project manager	March 2022
Identify research question	Project manager	March 2022
Literature review	Project manager	April-May 2022
Email former alumni survey to project manager	Project host	April 2022
Email alumni association constitution to project manager	Project host	April 2022
Develop quantitative & qualitative survey questions	Project manager	April 2022
Email survey questions to project host	Project manager	April 2022
Compile alumni contact information & email to project manager	Project host	May 2022
Submit status report	Project manager	May 2022
Send the survey	Project manager	June 2022
Complete the survey	Alumni	June 2022
Close the survey	Project manager	July 2022
Compile the survey data	Project manager	July 2022
Status update email to project host	Project manager	July 2022
Submit status report	Project manager	July 2022
Analyze survey data	Project manager	August-September 2022
Status update email to project host	Project manager	October 2022
Email survey data to project host	Project manager	October 2022
Summarize results & findings	Project manager	October-November 2022
Status update email to project host	Project manager	November 2022
Develop recommendations	Project manager	November 2022
Create an action alan	Project manager	December 2022
Submit status report	Project manager	December 2022
Deliver recommendations & action plan to project host	Project manager	February 2023

Resources and Budgeting

Resources for this project were primarily services, time, and labor. Due to the nature of this project, there is no anticipated budget. Any money spent was insignificant.

Risk Assessment

Due to the nature of the project, there are no major risks to the institution or alumni association related to increasing donations from recent alumni; however, there are some minimum risks to the college and alumni association and the result will primarily be a loss of opportunity. The loss of opportunity is related to recent alumni as potential

donors and the possibility to increase donations for the alumni association.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions are ideas and things that I expect to be true about this particular topic of study. Limitations are elements of the study that I have no control over. Delimitations are elements of the study that I do have control over. All three are listed in this section.

Assumptions

1. Community colleges will continue to seek external funding to support the mission of their institutions.

2. Alumni associations will continue to support and partner with community colleges to advance the institution's mission.

3. Alumni will be willing to support and donate to their alma mater.

Limitations

1. Number of alumni who respond to the survey

2. Alumni demographics such as age, gender, race, nationality, socioeconomic level

3. Previous research studies on the topics

4. Time constraints

Delimitations

1. Theoretical framework

2. Methodology

3. Research question

4. Survey questions

Literature Review

Background

Publicly funded higher education institutions have witnessed severe budget reductions and budget cuts over the last number of years (Mo & Zhu, 2022). Community colleges in particular have seen a tremendous amount of declining federal and state appropriations which forces colleges to seek alternative funding support (Akin, 2005). Fundraising and private giving "offers colleges and universities an alternative funding stream" (Skari, 2014, p. 24). Fundraising for any organization comes with challenges, but fundraising for a community college comes with its own unique set of challenges and issues. Community college fundraising efforts often face stiff competition from 4-year colleges and universities, as well as from other nonprofit organizations. Financial contributions to associate degree-granting institutions declined 15.4% between 2021 and 2022. At the same time, baccalaureate- and doctoral-granting institutions' private financial contributions increased significantly. Public institutions granting a bachelor's degree showed the most gains in contributions at 17.9% (Kaplan, 2023). According to the latest Voluntary Support of Education survey, total philanthropic giving to higher education in 2022 increased by 12.5%, for a total of $59.5 billion (Knox, 2023). Many colleges reported record-breaking historic fundraising amounts. Community colleges were the only institution type, other than public master's degree-granting institutions, to experience a decrease in private giving. Many community colleges have yet to prove they understand how to take full advantage of philanthropic giving; however, community colleges have the potential to experience the same amount of alumni giving success as 4-year institutions (Skari, 2014).

Alumni Associations

According to a study on successful community college alumni programs, Yale University had the first recorded alumni organization for a private institution in 1792. The first public university alumni organization was formed at the University of Michigan in 1897. The first 2-year alumni program was not reported until 1935, and "the potential of the alumni program was never fully understood until recently" (Boyd et al., 2009, p. 94). Alumni programs provide opportunities for social events such as class reunions, athletics, campus activities, and reward systems for alumni status, which may include discounts, special seats, early bird purchases, etc. (Hall, 2016). Continuous budget cuts have led community colleges to also seek financial support from alumni groups. Community colleges are finally acknowledging the need and importance of an alumni program. Community colleges are often forced to rely on the fundraising efforts of alumni groups to help fulfill the mission of the college and to sustain operations. "Alumni giving can make a positive impact on the stability and longevity" (Mo & Zhu, 2022, p. 1) of the higher education institution. Even though most community colleges have some type of formal alumni group, they are often relatively smaller and generate less income than their bigger 4-year counterparts (Akin, 2005). While community colleges have not been able to replicate the success of 4-year institutions in alumni giving, alumni associations at community colleges still play a key role in the advancement and financial growth of the institution (Hall, 2016). Alumni associations often work with little to no budget but are expected to raise a great deal of money from potential donors. Research shows that the majority of private donations come from alumni or individuals closest to the institution (Skari, 2014). As individuals transition from community college students

to alumni, alumni associations serve as a catalyst for alumni institutional support. Community college alumni associations have the task of nudging alumni toward the financial support of their alma mater.

Key Findings of Literature Review

The research question focused on why community college recent alumni are not giving, but the available literature was very limited on this topic. Most of the research focused on why alumni give, assuming that if the reasons given are not met, alumni will not give. Proceeding with this thought process in mind, there are several key findings identified in the literature review in regard to alumni giving. The key findings are important factors that predict or determine the likelihood of community college alumni giving. The key factors are

- student experience

- trust and transparency in giving

- communication

- alumni engagement

Student Experience

"Experiences during college can have an impact on the willingness for this new generation of recent graduates to make financial contributions years after they graduate" (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009, p. 87). According to several studies, alumni demographics such as age, gender, and race are not consistent predictors of alumni giving, but the student experience proved to be a highly consistent predictor of alumni giving (Skari, 2014). In fact, alumni satisfaction with their student experience was found to be the most important and "the most significant predictor in alumni giving" (Skari, 2014, p. 25).

Alumni were more willing to make financial gifts to their alma mater if the alumni were involved while at the institution and experienced overall satisfaction with their undergraduate experience (McDearmon, 2010). One study found that "alumni's positive feelings toward their community college are predictors of the probability of giving to their 2-year alma mater, with student involvement the strongest predictor of giving" (Skari, 2014, p. 36). If the perceived quality of their educational experience is better, students are more satisfied with their overall college experience and will likely be more generous with donations upon graduation (Mo & Zhu, 2022). Participation in student organizations and academic success were positively correlated to alumni giving (McDearmon, 2010). Alumni who experienced a sense of belonging while a student are more likely to be engaged with the institution upon graduation. Involvement in extracurricular activities and positive classroom experiences increased the likelihood of students becoming future donors to their alma mater (Wastyn, 2009). Close relationships between faculty and students triggered feelings of attachment which then led to gratitude that eventually led to donations (Mo & Zhu, 2022). A study reported that alumni made higher average donations when they had contact with faculty outside of class or contact with an advisor or with other college staff (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009). Student and institutional relationships played a significant part in alumni donor support. "After all, one's sense of loyalty to an alma mater begins while enrolled at the institution – not subsequent to graduation" (Hall, 2016, p. 36).

Trust and Transparency in Giving

Alumni trust in the foundation or alumni association can inspire monetary donations (Mo & Zhu, 2022). Non-donors in one study did not believe that the college

needed their money. These alumni had misgivings, misconceptions, and uncertainties about donating. They did not understand why the college needed their money and "misperceived what their gifts would support or they were uncertain how the college would use their donation" (Wastyn, 2009, p. 102). Utilizing annual reports to report on the organization's performance in preceding years is a way to demonstrate accountability and strengthen trust with alumni (Levine, 2008). Trust in the association can predict donation willingness (Mo & Zhu, 2022).

Communication

Communication is critical and an important component of alumni giving. The more frequent communication that takes place between alumni and faculty is a good indicator or higher levels of donations from alumni (Mo & Zhu, 2022). There are a multitude of ways to effectively communicate and interact with alumni using both print publications and electronic or digital avenues. Print publications include items such as newsletters, printed magazines, fundraising letters, annual reports, catalogs, press releases, and campaign materials (Levine, 2008). Electronic or digital items used by institutions to communicate with alumni are websites, electronic newsletters, email, news, TV ads, radio ads, and social media. It is important to effectively communicate with alumni, as this enhances alumni relationships (Mo & Zhu, 2022). While email is seen as a vitally important tool used by many alumni associations to stay in regular contact with alumni, email lists must be current. Research shows that it is important to keep good records and contact information of alumni up to date in order to establish good communication between alumni and alumni groups (Akin, 2005). Some colleges communicate through monthly or quarterly newsletters which "keep alumni up to date on

campus news, research, and activities, and help to strengthen the connection that alumni have to their alma maters" (Levine, 2008, pp. 182-183). In fact, once students graduate and leave the college, continued communication between the individual and the college "lies primarily with the institution's alumni relations program or alumni association" (Hall, 2016, p. 38). Alumni are not always aware of college needs, so it is up to the alumni association to communicate those needs. Frequent communication is very important, regardless of how the communication takes place (Hall, 2016). While it needs to be frequent, communication cannot always be an appeal for donations, as a constant solicitation of funds can have the opposite effect on alumni giving (Levine, 2008). To summarize, communicate with alumni using a variety of tools and methods and vary the content to strengthen the ties between the college and alumni.

Alumni Engagement

Former students have the potential to make a huge impact in community college advancement and fundraising (Heaton, 2014). Successful alumni programs provide numerous opportunities for former students to get involved with their alma mater. Inviting alumni to partake in events such as homecoming, reunions, and other social events, or asking alumni to volunteer or serve as brand ambassadors was recommended (Schmidt, 2018). Public relation events such as ribbon-cutting ceremonies and dedications of campus buildings were used to get alumni to visit campus. In the literature, active alumni association members served as advocates, mentors, tutors, volunteers, donors, marketing agents, facilitators, fundraising agents, institutional advancement officers, and even as recruitment tools. Alumni who have a strong sense of pride in their alma mater and connection to the institution were more likely to be involved. Alumni

engagement was key to alumni giving, which is key to maintaining a successful alumni association that supports the mission of the institution. Engaging alumni was instrumental in not only getting alumni involved but also in converting alumni to actual donors who monetarily support their alma mater. Structured and unstructured alumni programs and events increase alumni involvement, which has a positive correlation to alumni giving. It is necessary to note the importance of engaging alumni as early as possible after their graduation. As alumni approach their 10-year graduation anniversary, it is more difficult to engage alumni. If alumni have not been engaged by the 10-year mark, alumni are in danger of becoming uninvested in their alma mater (Rau & Erwin, 2015).

Summary

Based on the review of existing literature on alumni and giving, it is apparent that alumni make strategic decisions about donating money to their community college alma mater for a number of reasons. The main reason was the emotional connection alumni felt toward the college as a student and as a graduate. Several important factors, such as trust and communication, influence the connection and prove to be valuable in converting alumni to the role of active donors.

Gaps in Literature

Unfortunately, research on community college fundraising has not been thoroughly investigated as compared to their 4-year counterparts. The majority of the studies on this topic explain predictors of alumni giving. Several studies address how to build successful alumni programs and alumni associations, how to engage alumni, and how to boost alumni donor and giving programs. Very few studies aim to answer the question of why, which is the focus of my research. This study attempts to bridge the

research gap and answer the research question of why recent alumni are not donating money to the alumni association.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future studies to build on this topic or to develop similar topics.

1. Study on social media and community college alumni giving.

2. Study on building a culture of philanthropy at community colleges.

3. Study on crowdfunding at community colleges.

4. Study on E-philanthropy at community colleges.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is extremely important in any kind of research, dissertation, and development of a thesis. The theoretical framework helps to guide the research process and helps to align the study and the entire project. I used Kurt Lewin's Three-Step Change Theory, originally developed in 1947, for this project. I chose this theory because it is logical and goal-oriented (Kritsonis, 2005). Lewin's model is suited for an organizational analysis of planned change and has proven to be useful for nonprofit organizations seeking to transform in order to be more effective. This model of planned change does not replace traditional "organizational analysis methods such as strategic planning, but rather offers an innovative and practical theoretical enhancement that can be advantageous in building a more robust process for desired change" (Medley & Akan, 2008, p. 486). Lewin's three steps are unfreeze, move (or change), and refreeze. For the next section, I have identified the steps of Lewin's Change Theory and specific components within each change step relative to the consultancy project and this research

study.

Step 1: Unfreezing

Unfreezing refers to recognizing the need for a change, and encouraging, managing, and motivating individuals to change. This step is made up of planning, educating, informing, consulting, researching, organizing, and actually appointing leaders and change agents within the organization. This step involves building trust and group activities like brainstorming and problem-solving. The first step is critical as it is at this step that the current state of affairs or culture is identified. Resisting forces and the future state of affairs are also identified at the unfreezing step. It is at this early stage that "organizational members are encouraged through some operative mechanism to abandon old behaviors and attitudes and become open to accept new ones" (Medley & Akan, 2008, p. 487). Leaders and change agents help by reducing barriers to change and by creating incentives and rewards for change. Once the need for change is identified, organizational members begin to unfreeze old behaviors, attitudes, mindsets, beliefs, and assumptions. Those organizational members then become more open to and accepting of new ideas, behaviors, and approaches. It is helpful for the organizational members to see and experience firsthand the effectiveness and usefulness of the newly desired change.

Relative to this study, the alumni association is in need of a change to the way things have always been done in relation to alumni fundraising. While the alumni association has had fiscal stability in the past, it is at risk for financial problems in the future. The college has recently entered a new era of institutional history, which impacts how the alumni association works with alumni groups and solicits those groups for donations. The unfreezing involves changing the former practice of soliciting generations

of donors based on junior college reunion anniversaries. The alumni association must

broaden its horizons and look for other opportunities to solicit funds. The former practice,

the ongoing budget cuts across the state while enrollment continues to rise, and the lack

of recent alumni donors are all reasons a change must take place, and unfreezing is the

first step in that direction.

Step 2: Move/Change

The second step referred to as move or change is basically moving away or

actually changing the behavior. This is when employees and stakeholders are persuaded

to adopt the change, view things from a different perspective, and work together to

implement the change. This step involves training, leading, guiding, coaching, mentoring,

and feedback such as praise, encouragement, and recognition. This step includes

resources to make the change happen. This is also the time to highlight well-respected

leaders who support the change. In this stage, organizational members are guided through

the change process by taking part in the identification of the desired end result. Members

identify values, attitudes, behaviors, belief systems, viewpoints, and perspectives, which

help to support the new vision and change.

Relative to this study, alumni association members need to be educated on the

need to change and to view things from a different perspective. That perspective involves

the importance of seeing students and recent graduates as active potential donors. It is

this step when members work together to implement the changes and to support the

changes in the way they function as a group or association. It is important for alumni

association members to embrace the role current students and recent graduates can play

in the alumni association rather than just recruiting and relying on older alumni. As it

currently stands, most of the active alumni are former students from the junior college era, not current students. The new generation of recent alumni and current students is an untapped source of financial support for the college. This is the step where lots of changes are implemented and the focus shifts to include current students and recent graduates. The move/change step involves an increase in alumni engagement with current students and recent alumni. The increase in alumni engagement has a positive correlation to an increase in alumni giving.

Step 3: Refreezing

Refreezing is the third step in Lewin's model, and this always takes place after the change has been integrated into the organization. Monitoring and evaluation processes are important to the last step as those help to assure the change is being implemented. This step involves performance indicators, reinforcement, and sustaining the change for long-term success so the organization does not revert back to the old undesired behavior or culture. This last step is critical as it is the step in which the change is fully institutionalized throughout the organization to ensure operational success. The goal of the third step "is to enable organizational members to willingly accept and integrate new practices and reward systems that will reinforce the planned organizational change" (Medley & Akan, 2008, p. 488).

In relation to this study, this step will require monitoring of the alumni association's actions in order to make sure they are not reverting back to their former practice of working primarily with older alumni. This will include reinforcing changes by instituting formal mechanisms, such as policies and procedures, and a newly developed strategic plan guided by mission and vision statements linked to the college's strategic

plan. Informal mechanisms will also be implemented as needed.

Summary

Overall, this particular change model is introspective because it strives to analyze various forces that impact change (Kritsonis, 2005). Eventually, all organizations and institutions will need to undergo periodic transformation and change; therefore, leaders need to be able to navigate and effectively lead through organizational changes (Hughes et al., 2014). In order to survive and thrive, it is imperative that leaders are able to implement continuous and fundamental changes, even against the most resistant of circumstances and cultures.

One item worthy of discussion is that while Lewin's change theory appears rational and looks great on paper, when implementing any type of change, there are human feelings and experiences that need to be considered. Lewin's change theory actually sought to improve organizational effectiveness through a focus on the humanistic side of interactions and relationships (Medley & Akan, 2008). By forcing changes too quickly or without input from all parties, there can be negative consequences that are difficult to recover from. Lewin's model helps to reduce the negative outcomes by incorporating team-based change. While there is not one exact right way to change management, I feel certain that by following a tested and logical theory, such as Lewin's Three-Step Change Theory, change will be met with less resistance and more enthusiasm. Using Lewin's change theory as the theoretical framework, the study proposes that recent graduates of MSCC will make the decision to give monetarily based on the new model adopted during the move/change step, which results in a stronger connection to the college and the alumni association.

A popular model used to depict and represent Lewin's change theory is an ice cube analysis, as shown in Figure 7. The first step in the model is unfreeze and would be represented by a melting ice cube in the process of unfreezing or melting. The second step, move or change, would be the puddle of water after the ice cube melted. The ice cube is no longer visible, and it is now a puddle of water. The third step, refreeze, would be a new ice cube frozen solid after the change is complete. The ice cube model is widely used to depict Lewin's change theory because it aids in the basic understanding of the three steps. I like the ice cube depiction because you can visibly see how the change is processed in each step. This model provides a clear description of each step in the change process and makes connections through the familiar representation of a melting ice cube.

Figure 7

Lewin's Change Theory Model (Ohio Leadership Advisory Council, 2020)


UNFREEZE → CHANGE → REFREEZE

The model in Figure 8 also depicts Lewin's change theory but it shows the change theory as a cycle, or a never-ending circle. Sometimes the change process is complete and then another change needs to take place as a result of the first change, so it becomes a cycle of changes. While this model of Lewin's change theory is not as widely used as the ice cube model representation, I do prefer this model for this study. The reason I prefer this depiction for this study is that the alumni association will need to continue to make

changes, like a continuous circle or cycle. If an institution, such as the alumni association, wants to stay relevant and continue to support the mission of the college, it will require additional changes as future generations might be motivated by different reasons to give to their alma mater. In order to support the mission of the college and its changes, the alumni association will need to develop and change as well. Each generation brings about new changes that must be taken into consideration, like the use of social media in reaching and connecting with the current generation. What connects and tethers students to their community college today may not be what couples the next generation to their institution. In order to be effective, changes will need to be ongoing and ever-evolving.

Figure 8

Lewin's Change Theory Model (Broderick, 2013)
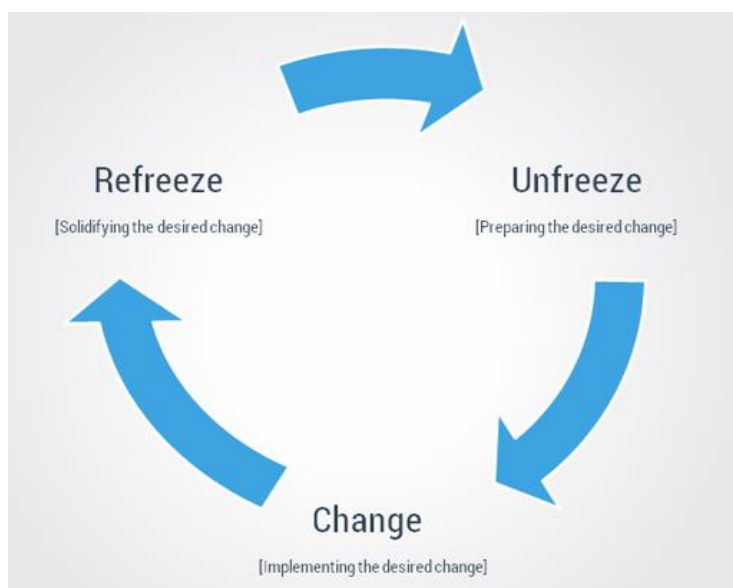
Methodology

In addition to selecting the best theoretical framework for this study, I also had to select the correct type of methodology to conduct the research. Methodology is simply the means or method by which I conduct the study. This study examined three types of

methodology: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodology, to determine the best fit to utilize when collecting data. Each method of data collection is unique and aligns best with certain types of studies. The three types are explained in detail in the following section.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is considered to be more subjective than quantitative research and is often used to understand complex problems or situations. Qualitative research is "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2009, p. 22). Qualitative data are descriptive and use words, instead of numerical values. Words such as see, feel, taste, hear, and smell that involve one or more of the five senses are often used in qualitative data collection. Because qualitative data are descriptive, they will be extremely helpful when trying to understand the experiences, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings of alumni in relation to giving. Qualitative data can be observations based on concepts, ideas, perceptions, fieldwork, and documents. Qualitative data collection can include open-ended survey questions, interviews, and/or focus groups. This type of data collection yields good results to help determine findings and reasons why alumni do what they do in relation to giving. Qualitative data gathering is necessary to understand alumni beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions toward giving, which are pertinent to the significant challenge in this research study. The purpose of qualitative research is to try and determine and figure out why something is or is not happening, such as monetarily supporting the alumni association.

Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is "testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables" (Creswell, 2009, p. 215). Quantitative data include numerical values but do not include descriptive values like words and phrases. Because quantitative data are numerical and involve some type of numerical survey, they are often used for measuring differences and relationships such as how often, how much, how little, or how many type statistics. The data are counted, numbered, and analyzed into data sets using statistical procedures. Quantitative data collection can be used to reveal the mode, median, and mean. Quantitative research involves a statistical analysis of the data. The purpose of quantitative data is to try and determine how many, how much, and/or how often things are or are not happening, such as monetarily supporting the alumni association.

Mixed Methodology Research

Mixed methods research is a type of methodology that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms of research queries (Creswell, 2009). Mixed methodology involves the assumption that the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches is best. This type of method is beneficial because it will yield better results than utilizing only one method (Royse et al., 2022). After additional reading on the different types of methodology, I decided that a mixed methods approach would be best for this study because mixed methodology provides a full comprehensive evaluation unattainable otherwise (Royse et al., 2022). Simply using one type of method was not sufficient for this study. I needed both quantitative and qualitative data that a mixed methods design would allow. Quantitative research is more objective, while qualitative research is more

subjective; by using both types of data, I will get a broader understanding of the problems and possible solutions for this study.
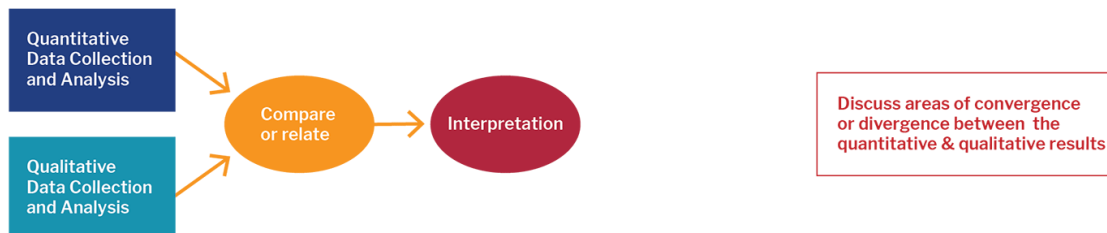
After deciding to utilize a mixed methods design, I researched various types of mixed methodology. This study examined three types of mixed methodology designs: convergent, explanatory, and exploratory. Convergent design data collection is described as parallel and both quantitative and qualitative data collection and data analysis happen at the same time. Explanatory mixed design is when quantitative data collection and analysis take place first, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis. An exploratory mixed design is when qualitative data collection and analysis take place first, and that analysis is then used to develop a quantitative data collection tool based on the qualitative results. The last step of all three mixed methods is called the interpretation stage or phase. This stage is important because that is the time to interpret the results of the data collection process. It is the point at which conclusions are drawn. Figure 9 depicts the three types of mixed methodology designs explored in this study, which allows for an easy comparison of each of the mixed methodology types.

Figure 9

Three Types of Mixed Methodology. (President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2023)

BASIC MIXED METHODS RESEARCH DESIGNS

Convergent Parallel Design

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis → Compare or relate → Interpretation

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis →

Discuss areas of convergence or divergence between the quantitative & qualitative results

Explanatory Sequential Design

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis → Follow up with → Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis → Interpretation

Determine what quantitative results need further explanation

Exploratory Sequential Design

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis → Builds to → Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis → Interpretation

Use qualitative results to develop a new instrument or taxonomy for quantitative strand

My initial plan was to use an explanatory mixed methodology design for this project. I planned to collect quantitative data first, through the use of an alumni survey, and then use the survey results to inform follow-up qualitative data collection through alumni interviews, focus groups, or open-ended surveys. This type of mixed methodology provides an overall, big picture, but it did not fit well with this study and in the allotted timeframe. After researching the three mixed methods in more detail, I then decided to use a convergent methodology design because it seemed to align better with my study. The convergent design seemed to be a speedier process of data collection because the quantitative and qualitative collections can both happen at the same time. Since this study had some university-imposed time constraints, convergent theory methods allowed me to meet deadlines. Convergent design is when the qualitative and quantitative data are

collected at the same time and analyzed at the same time to see if the results support one another. When the data collection transitions from one type of collection to a different type of collection in a mixed methods study, this is called the integration or point of interface. In this study, the integration takes place after the surveys are returned, as both the quantitative and the qualitative collection happened simultaneously; therefore, the analysis also happens simultaneously. The point of interface helps determine and identify comparisons between quantitative and qualitative survey results.

Summary

Based on the review of current literature, it is apparent that community college alumni make decisions to financially support their alma mater based on their feelings and experiences with the institution. Using the information presented in the literature review, alumni associations can develop successful alumni programs that engage recent alumni, with the end goal of increased donations from recent alumni. When alumni are engaged, communicated with, trust the association, and had strong connections as a student, it increases the likelihood of the alumni financially supporting the community college. The literature review section can be used to inform and revise best practices in the area of alumni relations related to alumni engagement and alumni fundraising efforts to increase alumni giving. The next chapter describes the convergent mixed methodology used for this study in more detail.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Methodology research design is important to a study because it determines how data are collected, analyzed, and organized. My research question, "Why are recent community college alumni not donating money to their alma mater," had to be considered when selecting the methodology design. Specific to study, I need to know why recent alumni are not donating as frequently as other alumni. In order to answer the research question and help with the significant problem, the alumni association provided me access to a 2020 alumni survey and survey results. This survey was conducted in-house through the alumni association. From the 2020 alumni survey results, I learned that 92.46% of alumni did not attend the Alumni Day celebration that year. Results from another 2020 Alumni Day survey show 92.29% of respondents have never attended an MSCC class reunion. These results, combined with the literature review, helped guide the research process going forward. I realized that I also need to know why alumni are not engaged, since the literature review revealed that alumni engagement is a big indicator of alumni giving. According to the literature review, engagement and connection are key indicators of alumni giving.

This chapter describes in detail the mixed methodology design used in this study. This chapter discusses how I developed and validated the survey. This chapter presents the research design and the survey in great detail, including how the survey was developed. Settings and participants, survey distribution, survey collection, and survey analysis make up Chapter 3. I explain the process of data collection from beginning to end. It is important to note that during the data collection process, everything possible

was done to assure that the results of both surveys were reliable and valid.

Research Design

This study utilized a convergent mixed methods design survey for the data collection. Convergent methodology provides a comprehensive analysis of the quantitative data and the qualitative data. Since I am using convergent methodology for this project, I collected both quantitative and qualitative data in the same survey at the same time. Utilizing a convergent mixed methods approach allowed me to fully understand the what (quantitative) and the why (qualitative) of the significant problem of this study. Once approval was obtained from the GWU Institutional Review Board (IRB), survey development could begin (see Appendix A for the IRB certificate). Figure 10 shows my score on the IRB basic course required for DEOL student researchers by the GWU Graduate School of Education Research Investigators. I had to complete this course prior to any type of survey development. I scored 99% on the course; 85% was passing.

Figure 10

Basic Course Score

Records

Gardner-Webb University (ID 2267)

Show Records for: Gardner-Webb University ▼   Show All

Gardner-Webb University Records (ID 2267)

Graduate School of Education Research Investigators (ID 56338)

Stage	Record ID	Passing Score	Your Score	Start Date	Completion Date	Expiration Date	Gradebook	Completion Record
Basic Course	46529955	85%	99%	22-Nov-2021	10-Jan-2022	09-Jan-2025	View	View-Print-Share

Qualtrics

Qualtrics is an online survey building and management tool utilized by GWU in the DEOL program. Original survey questions were built and developed in Microsoft (MS) Word and then copied into Qualtrics. In order to correctly format the survey questions so they could be copied into Qualtrics, I had to follow very specific instructions provided by the DEOL faculty. I had to turn off all editing, numbering, and formatting in MS Word. I could not number the questions or use bold, italics, underlining, coloring, or shading of any kind. I was not able to copy screenshots or pictures from PNGs or JPEGs. There were other specific formatting instructions that were intended for only certain types of questions included in the survey. Different types of questions had to be set up in MS Word in a very specific way for the questions to be able to be successfully copied into Qualtrics.

Participants and Setting

Data collection consisted of an anonymous survey (with informed consent in the email) of 3,054 alumni who have graduated from MSCC within the last 10 years, which includes 2012-2021 graduates. In total, there were 17 questions for recent alumni to answer. The survey included four demographic questions that asked alumni to identify their role, age, graduation year, and preferred means of communication. The rest of the questions focused on donations and alumni association events. The questions were comprised of two multiple-choice questions, two yes/no questions, three open-ended questions, and six agree/disagree statements. Questions are listed below.

1. What is your Role at MSCC? Please check all that apply.
2. What is your Age Group?

3. What year did you graduate from MSCC?

4. What is your Preferred Means of Communication? Please check all that apply.

5. Do you attend MSCC Alumni Association events?

6. Why do you attend MSCC Alumni Association events? Or why don't you attend MSCC Alumni Association events?

7. Do you donate to the MSCC Alumni Association?

8. Why do you donate to the MSCC Alumni Association? Or why don't you donate to the MSCC Alumni Association?

9. If you donate, how would you rate the ease of your donation experience?

10. How do you prefer to donate to the MSCC Alumni Association?

11. If you do not currently donate, what could persuade you to donate to the MSCC?

12. The MSCC makes it easy for donors to donate money.

13. The MSCC Alumni Association makes it clear what donated money is used for.

14. The MSCC Alumni Association makes it easy to stay in contact with them.

15. The MSCC Alumni Association communicates regularly with me using my preferred mode of communication.

16. The MSCC Alumni Association makes me aware of alumni events.

17. The MSCC Alumni Association provides meaningful events for alumni.

Participation in the survey was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants of the survey were informed that they were allowed to opt out at any time throughout the survey if they so chose. Participants

were given directions on how to withdraw, which were to exit the survey without submitting. Participants were also informed that they had the right to refuse to answer any of the individual questions for any reason without penalty. Participants were provided directions on how to refuse to answer an individual question, which was to skip that question and proceed to the next question. There were no anticipated risks to participants for partaking in the study, and there were no direct benefits associated with participation in the study. Participants were informed that they would receive no payment for participating.

Survey Validation

Survey validation was a two-step process. Step 1 was to establish the validity of the survey, which involved having my survey reviewed by two different individuals. My dissertation advisor helped assure that the survey did not contain any leading or confusing questions and checked the survey for errors. The project host, or consultancy project partner, was emailed the survey questions and given the opportunity to make sure the questions correctly captured the topic of the study. These were completed before the survey went live. Step 2 involved doing a practice run of the survey to make sure the questions read well and were formatted correctly. The test run proved that it was ready and did not need any additional editing.

Survey Distribution

The anonymous survey was emailed on June 17, 2022, using my GWU student email. At first, I had some technical difficulties sending the emails because the number of email recipients was limited to 500, but my survey needed to be sent to 3,054 individuals. I had to send multiple emails in groups with less than 500 recipients in order to send all

the emails. Of the 3,054 individuals, there were 1,370 emails returned as undeliverable. I

utilized blind copy so the recipients were not aware of others receiving the email, and I

blind copied my dissertation faculty advisor on the emails. The email contained a link to

the Qualtrics survey, and when the survey submit button was hit, the responses were sent

directly to Qualtrics. In the email, I identified myself as a DEOL student at GWU and an

employee of MSCC in order to strengthen trust, which I hoped would improve the survey

rate of return. I also stated that I was working in conjunction with the MSCC alumni

association. The email listed the purpose of the study, the procedure of the survey, the

time required to complete the survey, a participation statement, confidentiality

information, risks, and benefits. The main reason I wanted the responses to be

anonymous is that I was inquiring about money and I wanted honest answers. From the

literature review, I had the notion that maybe the recent alumni are not donating because

they are not engaged and involved, two of the reasons proven to increase alumni giving. I

decided to include some questions regarding association events since the involvement

and donating might be related. I put those questions ahead of donation questions so

participants would not be too intimidated by questions regarding money right from the

beginning. The email is copied in Figure 11, but identifying employee/partnering

information is redacted from the email.

Figure 11

Email to Recent Alumni

Dear Alumni,

I am a student in the DEOL program at Gardner-Webb University and an employee at ███████ ████████████. I am working in conjunction with the █████████████████████ Alumni Association on a research study to help determine ways to engage alumni. Please read the information below and then click on the below to take a short survey.

Purpose of the Study: To determine ways to engage alumni in order to increase participation in alumni events and alumni giving. This study will focus on both quantitative data and qualitative data using an explanatory methodology approach.

Procedure: Participants are expected to answer all of the survey questions provided through the link below. However, if there is a question that causes discomfort, you are welcome to skip it and proceed to the next question.

Time Required: It is anticipated that this survey will require approximately 10 minutes of your time.

Participation: Participation in this survey is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To withdraw, simply exit the survey without submitting. You also have the right to refuse to answer any of the individual questions for any reason without penalty. To refuse to answer an individual question, simply skip that question and proceed to the next question.

Confidentiality: The survey responses provided will be confidential and no names will be collected with the survey.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks in this study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

If you have any questions about the study or the survey, please contact Beverly Rufty, EdD Candidate either by email (brufty@gardner-webb.edu) or phone (704-437-3850). You may also contact Dr. Dale Lamb, Faculty Advisor/Professor, College of Education, Gardner-Webb University by email (dlamb@gardner-webb.edu) or phone (704-575-4399).

Again, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. **Please complete and submit the survey by Friday, July 1, 2022.**

https://gardnerwebb.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3yfcclIwl50eg74

Qualtrics Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management
Qualtrics makes sophisticated research simple and empowers users to capture customer, product, brand & employee experience insights in one place.
gardnerwebb.az1.qualtrics.com

Data Collection

The survey utilized a convergent design of mixed methodology, so the data collected for both the quantitative and the qualitative questions were collected simultaneously. Participants were asked to complete and submit the survey by June 30, 2022. On June 24, 2022, alumni were informed that the date for submission had been extended to July 1, 2022. Alumni were informed of the extension by email. Of the 1,684 total emails that were not returned as undeliverable, 61 surveys were returned by July 1; which means the survey response rate was 3.62%. Qualtrics organized the data collection as survey responses were submitted directly to Qualtrics and not to my personal email.

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative survey questions incorporated into the convergent design survey required an analysis. Because there were two different data collection types, quantitative and qualitative, there were two different analysis types, mode and theme.

Qualitative Themes

The analysis of the qualitative questions produces common themes of the respondent answers. This analysis involved examining each of the three open-ended questions (Questions 6, 8, and 11) in order to identify common themes of the responses.

Question 6. After analyzing the responses to Question 6, "Why do you attend MSCC Alumni Association events? Or why don't you attend MSCC Alumni Association events," several common themes emerged. The most common theme was a lack of awareness of events or communication about events. Many respondents stated that they do not attend events because they are not aware of them or do not receive communication

about them. Other common themes included scheduling conflicts, living out of town or out of state, and a lack of interest in events or feeling disconnected from the school. Some respondents also cited COVID-19 as a reason for not attending events. Finally, a few respondents stated that they would attend events if they were more fun or if they had more information about them. Overall, the most common theme was a lack of awareness or communication about events, suggesting the need for better promotion and communication strategies.

Question 8. After analyzing the responses to Question 8, "Why do you donate to the Alumni Association? Or why don't you donate to the Alumni Association," several common themes emerged. The most common reason for not donating was financial constraints. Many respondents stated that they cannot afford to donate at this time or that money is tight. Other common themes included a lack of awareness of the alumni association or its purpose, a lack of understanding of how donations are used, and a preference for donating to other causes. Some respondents also stated that they are currently pursuing their education and do not have the ability to donate at this time. Finally, a few respondents cited a lack of interest in donating or a belief that colleges make enough money. The most common reason for donating is the belief that it is a good cause. Overall, the most common theme was a lack of awareness or understanding of the alumni association, suggesting the need for better promotion and communication strategies to increase awareness and understanding of the purpose and impact of donations.

Question 11. After analyzing the responses to Question 11, "If you do not currently donate, what could persuade you to donate to the Alumni Association," several

common themes emerged. The most common theme was the desire for more information about the impact of donations and how the money is spent. Respondents also expressed a desire for communication about the purpose of the donation, future plans for the money, and what specific projects or causes the donations support. Many respondents stated that they would donate if they knew the money would be put to good use and if they had more information about the alumni association. Other common themes included a desire for more community events, incentives for donating, and a financial explanation for why donations are needed. Finally, some respondents expressed that they are not in a financial position to donate at this time.

Quantitative Mode

The analysis of the quantitative questions was the mode. Mode is the most common answer or the most common response to each qualitative question. The mode analysis involved an examination of the multiple-choice questions, yes/no questions, and agree/disagree statements. Basically, the mode is each question's most popular or most frequently answered response. The mode allowed me to fully understand what was happening with alumni by quantifying and analyzing their responses. Table 7 lists each quantitative question and the mode for that question.

Table 7

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative questions	Mode
What is your Role at MSCC?	Alumni
What is your Age Group?	18-25
What year did you graduate from MSCC?	2021
What is your Preferred Means of Communication?	Email
Do you attend MSCC Alumni Association events?	No
Do you donate to the MSCC Alumni Association?	No
If you donate, how would you rate the ease of your donation experience?	Easy
How do you prefer to donate to the MSCC Alumni Association?	Debit/Credit Card
The MSCC makes it easy for donors to donate money.	Agree
The MSCC Alumni Association makes it clear what donated money is used for.	Agree
The MSCC Alumni Association makes it easy to stay in contact with them.	Agree
The MSCC Alumni Association communicates regularly with me using my preferred mode of communication.	Agree
The MSCC Alumni Association makes me aware of alumni events.	Agree
The MSCC Alumni Association provides meaningful events for alumni.	Agree

Summary

This study required both quantitative data and qualitative data to fully understand the significant problem of why community college recent alumni are not donating to their alma mater. The decision to utilize a convergent mixed methods design for data

collection proved to be the best fit for this study, as it allows for both quantitative and qualitative to be collected at the same time, which was important since I had some time restraints to consider. The data analysis provided a common theme for the open-ended qualitative responses and a mode of the quantitative responses. Chapter 4 goes into greater detail in regard to exploring the results and findings of the theme and the mode.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

   After completing both the quantitative and qualitative analysis, the next step is to present the results and explore and expound on those findings in detail. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study based on the original research question, the literature review, and the survey results. This chapter explores the qualitative themes and the quantitative mode to evaluate what I discovered and what the discovery means in relation to the literature review. This chapter circles back to the literature review to explore the reasons recent alumni are not giving to see if the reasons are what we would expect based on the literature results. Lastly, this chapter summarizes all the findings to springboard into the final chapter, which includes a study overview and recommendations to the alumni association.

   Several findings can be drawn from the study. The findings are based on the analysis of the survey results in relation to the research question, "Why are recent community college alumni not donating money to their alma mater?" The findings are developed around the themes and modes of the survey responses.

Qualitative Results

   During the analysis of the open-ended responses, there was one major theme that emerged that brought insight into the thoughts and minds of recent alumni. The major theme was communication and the need for alumni to be informed and be made aware of events and information regarding donations. Communication, awareness, and information, or lack thereof, were the most prominent answers throughout the qualitative analysis. Samples of individual responses related to the theme are presented in the

following sections.

Question 6

Open-Ended Question 6 asked recent alumni about MSCC alumni association events. "Why do you attend MSCC Alumni Association events? Or why don't you attend MSCC Alumni Association events?" I asked this question to see the relationship between engagement and giving. There were a total of 46 responses to this question. Of the 46 responses, several recent alumni referenced living out of town as a reason they do not attend alumni events. Some alumni reported that other obligations such as family, work, and scheduling conflicts were the reason for not attending. One alumnus cited the recent global pandemic, COVID-19, as a reason not to attend. However, the most common reason given for not attending alumni events is the lack of information regarding events. The following alumni response statements from the survey reflect the lack of communication between recent alumni and the alumni association.

- I haven't heard of any events.

- I am unfamiliar with the events.

- I would definitely go to events; I just don't hear about them.

- Didn't know

- Don't know of any

- Really aren't aware of the dates and time of the events

- I do not attend MSCC Alumni Association events because I do not receive any communication about them.

- I didn't know about them, and I don't live nearby.

- Never heard anything

- I have never been invited.

- I didn't know about it.

- I didn't know this existed.

- Don't remember seeing any in email

- I've never heard about any.

- I have received very few communications about MSCC Alumni Association events.

- Don't know when they are, and I never was on campus. I'm also older than a lot of my classmates were.

- I am unaware of any old or current alumni-based events.

- Don't know what events there are and I don't know that I feel that kind of connection to the school.

According to this analysis, the lack of awareness of events or communication about events is the most common reason for not attending MSCC alumni association events. It is important to note that one of the responses above also cited a lack of connection to the school, in addition to not being aware of the alumni association events.

Question 8

Open-Ended Question 8 asked recent alumni about donating to the alumni association. "Why do you donate to the Alumni Association? Or why don't you donate to the Alumni Association?" There were a total of 38 responses to this question. Of the 38 responses, several recent alumni referenced financial restraints, that money was tight, and that they do not have the ability to donate at this time due to other financial obligations. There were several alumni who cited a lack of awareness of the alumni association or its

purpose, a lack of understanding of how donations are used, and the impact of donations. The following alumni response statements from the survey reflect the theme of alumni lack of knowledge surrounding donations and giving to the alumni association.

- I didn't know there was a way to donate to the association.

- Don't know how and don't know what the money would be used for.

- Don't even know about it.

- Never really thought about it and don't know what the money is used for.

- Never thought about it.

- Didn't know.

- Didn't know about it.

- Never understood how the system works.

- Unaware of association until now. Generally don't believe in making blind donations to organizations.

- I do not donate to the MSCC Alumni Association because I did not realize that one existed.

- I didn't know that there was an option to donate.

- I do not donate because I had no awareness of the MSCC Alumni Association.

- I have not even heard of this as a possibility.

- I didn't even know there was a thing, I am also funding my daughter's college and I am in a DNP program.

- I didn't know about it.

- I am 16 and just got my first job so I don't have money to donate and once again I didn't know it existed.

- I've never heard of it.

- I am barely aware of the MSCC Alumni Association.

- I am unaware of this donation service.

Overall, the most common theme is a lack of awareness or understanding of the alumni association or how the money is used. It is important to note that one response stated their reason for not donating is that colleges make enough money. While I did not include this in the reason above, this statement is likely due to a lack of knowledge or understanding of what the college needs money for, so technically this response should be included with the responses above. These statements suggest the need for better promotion and communication strategies to increase awareness and understanding of the purpose and impact of donations.

Question 11

Open-Ended Question 11 asked recent alumni, "If you do not currently donate, what could persuade you to donate to the Alumni Association?" There were a total of 37 responses to this question. Of the 37 responses, many recent alumni stated that they needed more information about the donations and what the money would be used for. Several alumni responses centered on events. These alumni wanted more events such as community service events, fun activities, and/or kid-friendly events hosted by alumni. One response stated that if the amount of the donation request was small and not frequent, they could be convinced to donate. Another alumnus stated that they would like some sort of incentive in order to donate. The following alumni response statements from the survey reflect the major theme and need for alumni to know more information in order for them to donate to the alumni association.

- #1 Make more money to afford to donate. #2 I don't see a reason or purpose to donate.

- Seeing/learning about the difference that the donations would make.

- I will donate; I would prefer more information.

- Share the importance of MSCC to the community.

- I'd like to make sure my money is being put to a good cause and see progress.

- Knowing the money would be put to good use and having someone to help me with issues regarding my time at MSCC.

- To learn about it. Uses of the money.

- More info on where the money goes/what does it support.

- Communication about what the purpose is for the donation.

- If I knew how the money was spent.

- Letting me know how to, and what this organization represents.

- See the benefit of the donation in helping community members.

- An explanation of the benefits of donating to the MSCC Alumni Association.

- Information about the MSCC Alumni Association, a rough estimate of what contributions would be helpful, future plans for the money (I need full transparency when it comes to donating for causes so I can feel assured the money is used properly.)

- Understanding why donations are needed.

- Knowing that the Alumni Association existed.

- What do donations go towards?

- Interesting communications about developments at MSCC, and events I can

attend.

- Financial explanation of how the tuition and state money is not enough to cover expenses or goals.

- The funds would have to be going to a specific purpose that I feel strongly about.

Respondents wanted more information on where the money goes, how it is used, and what it supports. They also wanted to know the purpose of the donation and how it aligns with the organization's mission. Alumni wanted transparency and information. Some alumni wanted a tangible impact. It is important to note that one alumnus stated that they could not be persuaded to donate, while others stated they would donate in the future when they were financially able.

Quantitative Summary

Based on the collected data, the major theme of communication has been identified as the reason recent alumni do not donate to the MSCC alumni association. Three supporting themes have also been identified:

- lack of information on alumni association

- lack of awareness of alumni association events

- lack of knowledge about donations and how donated money is spent

Quantitative Results

The analysis of the quantitative questions provided additional insight into recent alumni. The analysis involved an examination of statistical data, percentages, and modes for each quantitative question, which provided additional information about recent alumni engagement and giving. This analysis included multiple-choice questions, yes/no

questions, and agree/disagree statements. The following section breaks down the statistical analysis of the data for each of the 14 quantitative questions. Figures 12-25 utilize a graphic representation to depict quantitative responses in the form of bar graphs. Bar graphs show the relationship between independent and dependent (alumni of MSCC) variables of each question. The mode is shown by the longest bar, as the mode is the most answered response to each question.
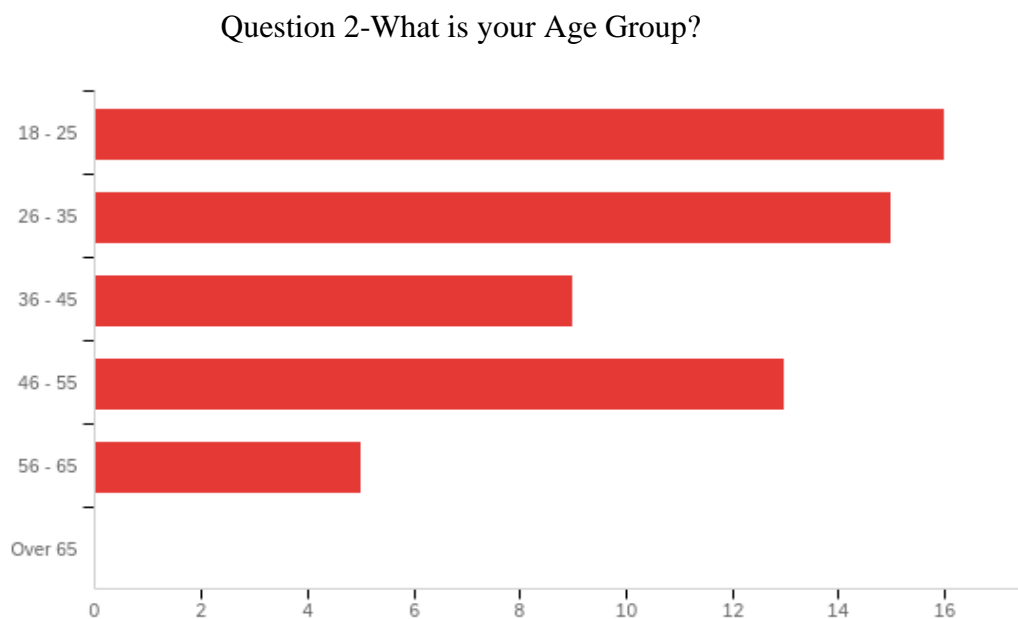
Question 1

Question 1 was a multiple-choice question and asked participants to identify all the roles that applied to them. Results show that 85.52% (54) of the respondents selected alumni, 8.20% selected student, and 3.28% selected staff. This indicates that some of the alumni who graduated within the 10-year span (2012-2021) of the survey are staff. We do not know if they were staff while attending MSCC or if they were hired upon graduation from the college. Five of the respondents selected student. Those individuals could have graduated and then returned to the college to get another degree, or maybe they do not consider themselves to be alumni. This is a possibility since several respondents indicated in the qualitative questions that they lack information about alumni and the alumni association. Figure 12 shows the responses for Question 1 in a bar graph. The mode, alumni, is indicated by the longest bar.

Figure 12

Question 1 Bar Graph

Question 1-What is your role at MSCC? Please check all that apply.
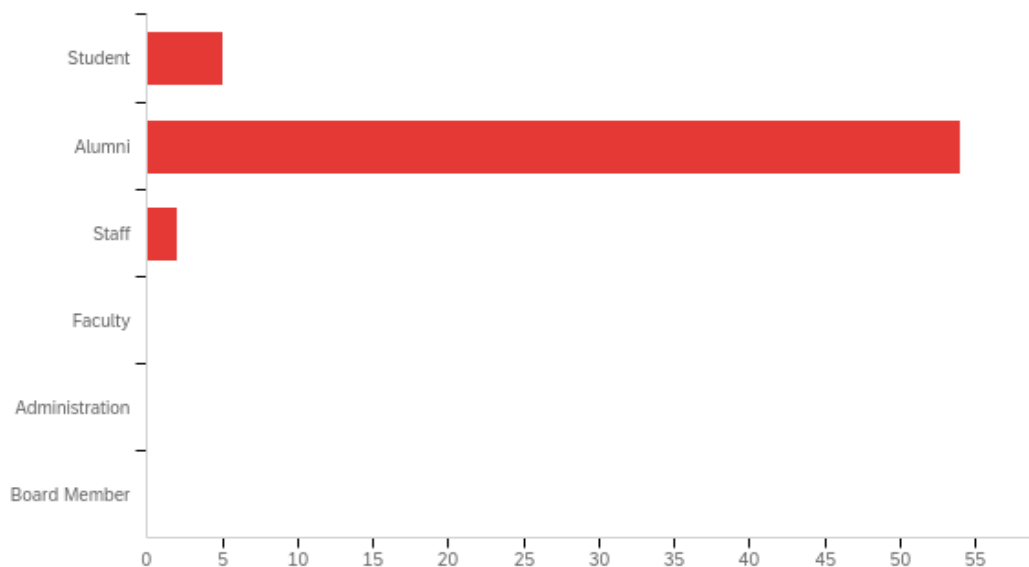
Question 2

Question 2 was a multiple-choice question and asked participants to identify their age group. The majority of respondents, 27.59% selected 18-25 years of age; however, the age range 26-35 was a close second at 25.86%. The exact number of responses for those answers was 16 and 15 total, which means the difference between the two answers was only one digit or one respondent. A few alumni selected 55-65 years of age, and none selected over age 65. Figure 13 shows the responses for Question 2 in a bar graph. The mode, age 18-25, is indicated by the longest bar.

Figure 13

Question 2 Bar Graph

Question 2-What is your Age Group?

Question 3

Question 3 was a multiple-choice question that asked participants to select the year they graduated from MSCC. The only choices were the last 10 years (2012-2021), as I wanted to focus on recent alumni since the research question centers on recent alumni. The results show that 18.18% selected 2021 as their graduation year. The following years were tied in second place with 14.55% of the responses: 2020, 2018, and 2015. I found it interesting that each year was represented by some of the respondents, even if only three selected that year, or 5.45%. Figure 14 shows the responses for Question 3 in a bar graph. The mode, graduation year 2021, is indicated by the longest bar.

Figure 14

Question 3 Bar Graph

Question 3 - What year did you graduate from MSCC?
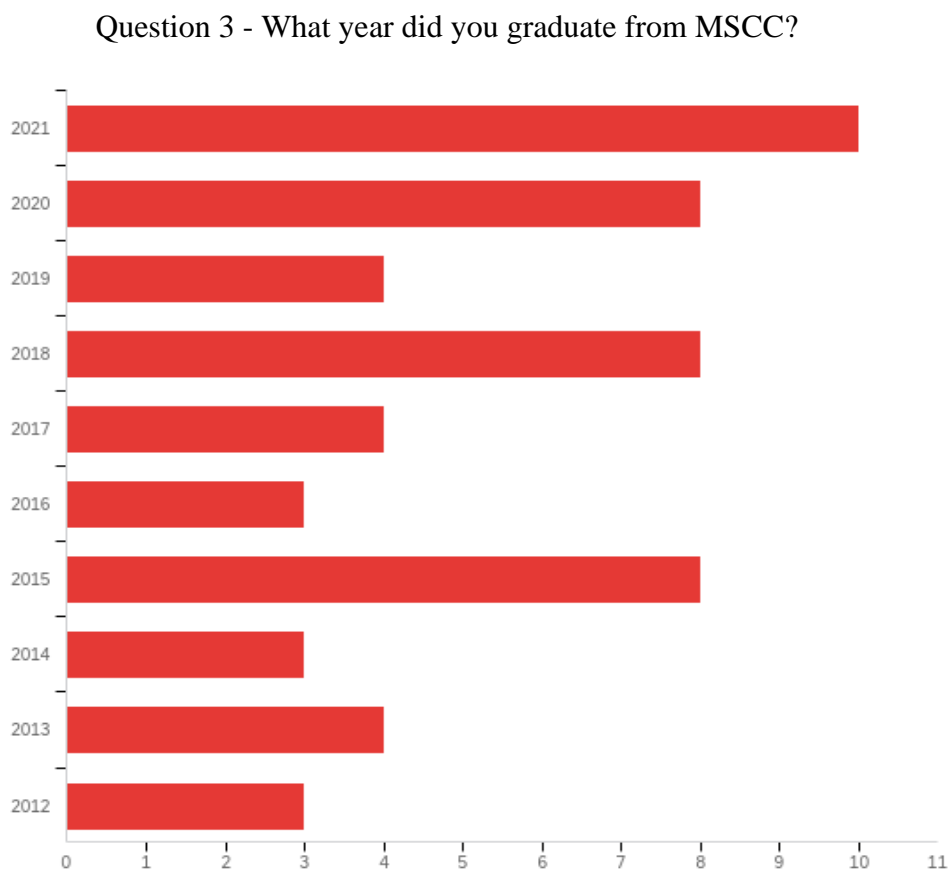
Question 4

Question 4 was a multiple-choice question that asked alumni to select all their preferred means of communication out of 10 choices. Since respondents selected all, there were a total of 107 responses to this question. This question had the highest number of participants answer it. Email was the most popular response, with 54 individuals selecting email as their preferred means of communication. That would be 50.47% of the 107 responses. Text messages came in second at 23.36%, and regular postal mail came in third at 8.41%. The higher return rate of this question is not surprising since the question relates to communication, and some of the qualitative data results indicated that the

alumni want improved communication in order to donate and be involved in events. Email is the most answered response, but 1,370 of the original emails I sent out came back as undeliverable.

I assume that if we surveyed other years beyond the 10 years, that email would also be the mode for those years. No one selected Twitter or WhatsApp for Question 4, and no one listed any other form of social media. Figure 15 shows the responses for Question 4 in a bar graph. The mode, email, is indicated by the longest bar.

Figure 15

Question 4 Bar Graph

Question 4 - What is your preferred Means of Communication? Please check all that apply.
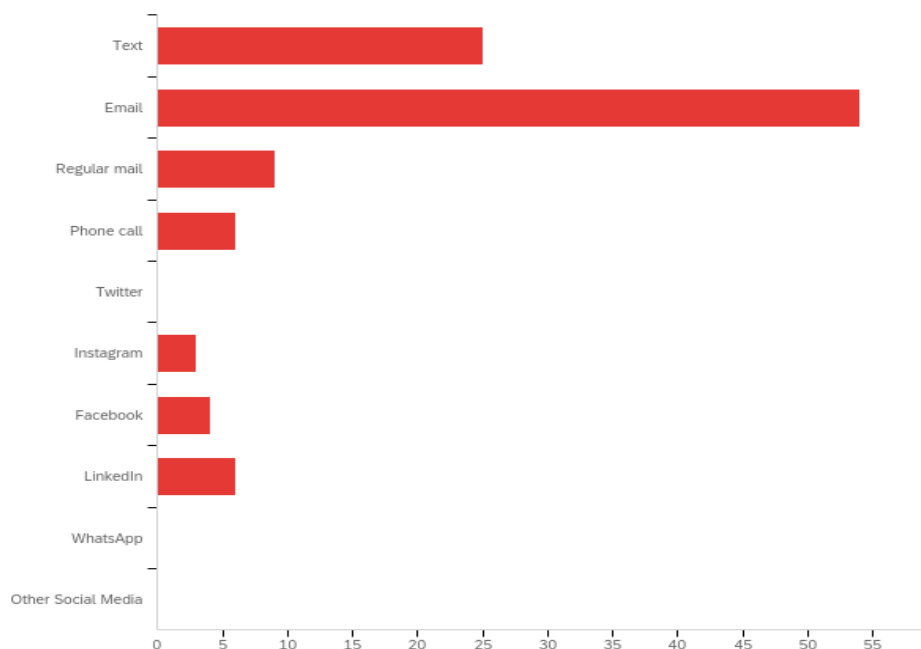
Question 5

Question 5 was a yes/no question and asked recent alumni to indicate if they attended MSCC alumni association events or not. The majority of respondents, 91.53%,

answered no, they do not attend MSCC alumni association events. Overall, 54 alumni answered no, five alumni answered yes, and one alumnus skipped this question. Figure 16 shows the responses for Question 5 in a bar graph. The mode, no, is indicated by the longest bar.

Figure 16

Question 5 Bar Graph

Question 5 - Do you attend MSCC Alumni Association events?
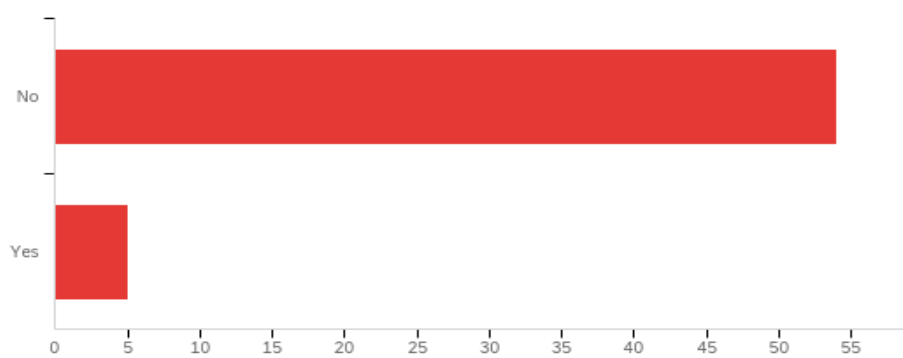
Question 7

Question 7 was a yes/no question and asked alumni to indicate if they donated to the MSCC alumni association. The majority of respondents, 92.98%, answered no, they do not donate to the MSCC alumni association. Overall, 53 alumni answered no, four alumni answered yes, and three alumni skipped this question. Figure 17 shows the responses for Question 7 in a bar graph. The mode, no, is indicated by the longest bar.

Figure 17

Question 7 Bar Graph

Question 7 - Do you donate to MSCC Alumni Association?
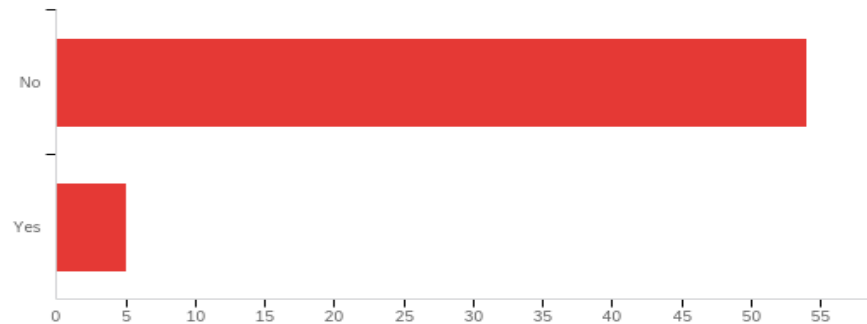
Question 9

Question 9 was a multiple-choice question and asked alumni to rate the ease of their donation experience if they donate to the MSCC alumni association. Two alumni responded and both selected easy. This means that two of the four who indicated in Question 7 that they donate to the alumni association did not answer this question. The remainder of the participants skipped this question. Figure 18 shows the responses for Question 9 in a bar graph. The mode, easy, is indicated by the longest bar.

Figure 18

Question 9 Bar Graph

Question 9 – If you donate, how would you rate the ease of your donation experience?
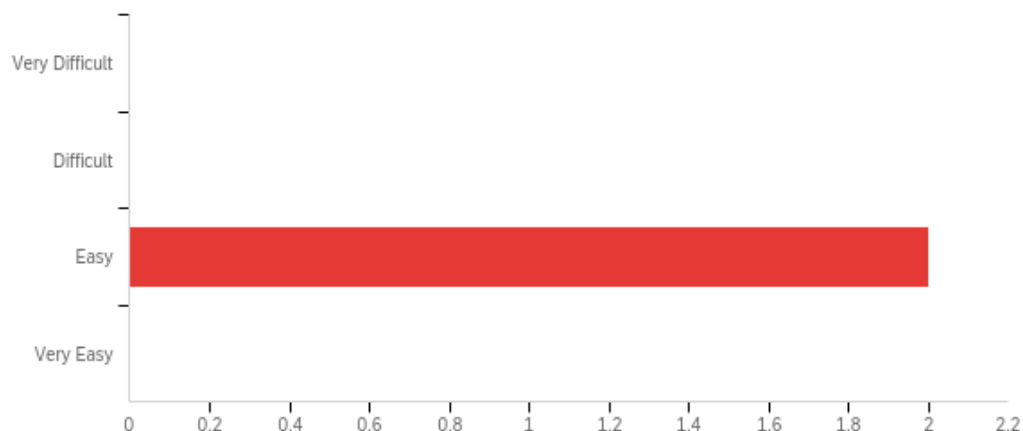
Question 10

Question 10 was a multiple-choice question that asked alumni to select their preference for donating to the MSCC alumni association. A total of 24 participants answered the question with debit/credit card being the most selected response at 37.50%, or nine alumni. Venmo/CashApp/Paypal was the second most selected answer at 33.33%, or eight alumni. No recent alumni selected bank draft as their preference for donating to the alumni association. Figure 19 shows the responses for Question 10 in a bar graph. The mode, debit/credit card, is indicated by the longest bar.

Figure 19

Question 10 Bar Graph

Question 10 – How do you prefer to donate to the MSCC Alumni Association?
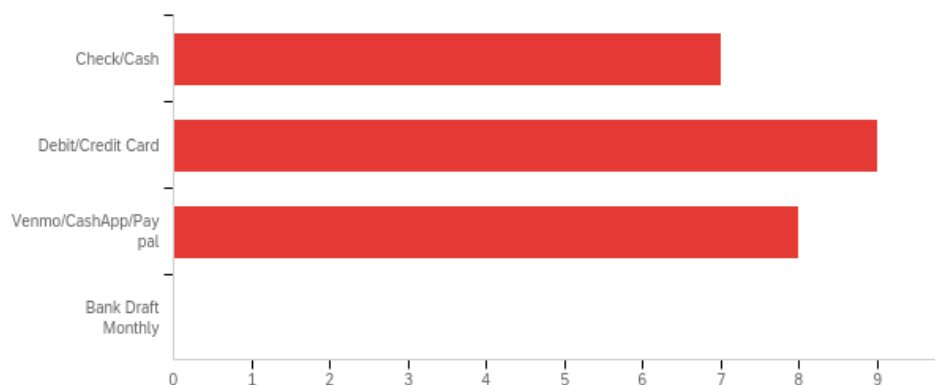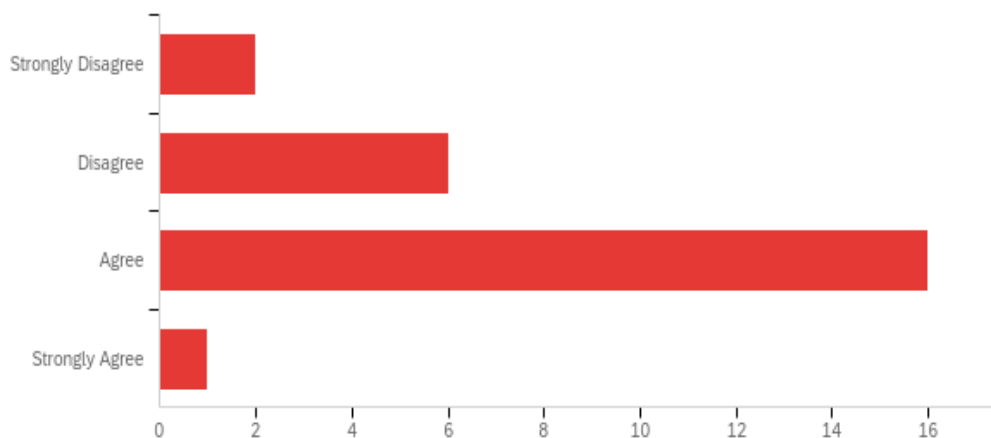

Question 12

Questions 12-17 are all agree/disagree statement questions. Respondents were to select which phrase from a choice of four options (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree) best aligned with their experience in regard to donations for the alumni association and alumni association events. Question 12 asked alumni if the MSCC alumni association makes it easy for donors to donate money. Twenty-five alumni answered Question 12: 64%, or 16 of the respondents, selected agree; 4%, or one respondent, selected strongly agree; 24%, or six respondents, selected disagree; 8%, or two respondents, selected strongly disagree. Figure 20 shows the responses to Question 12. The mode, agree, is indicated by the longest bar.

Figure 20

Question 12 Bar Graph

Question 12 - The MSCC Alumni Association makes it easy for donors to donate money.
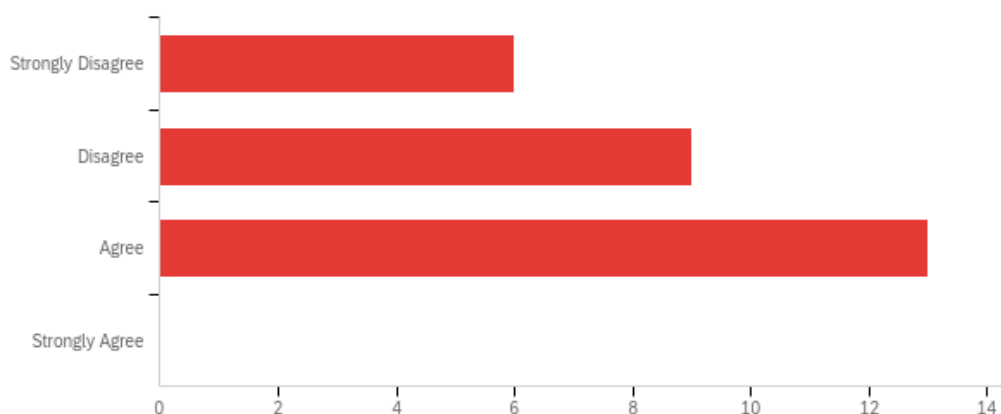

Question 13

　　　　Question 13, an agree/disagree statement, asked participants if the MSCC alumni association makes it clear what the donated money is used for. Twenty-eight alumni answered this question, and 46.43% selected agree, while 32.4% selected disagree and 21.43% selected strongly disagree. No one selected strongly agree as an answer. The results of this answer were that 53.57% selected disagree or strongly disagree statements. This is an example of when a bar graph might not be a great visual representation because if one looks at the mode, agree, one thinks that most participants agree with this statement. The best way to look at the data for this question is to look at disagree and strongly disagree as a category while agree and strongly agree would be a separate category. The majority of the participants disagreed that the MSCC alumni association makes it clear what donated money is used for. Figure 21 shows the responses to Question 12. The mode, agree, is indicated by the longest bar, but if you add the two disagree statements up, they are more than the mode.

Figure 21

Question 13 Bar Graph

Question 13 - The MSCC Alumni Association makes it clear what donated money is used
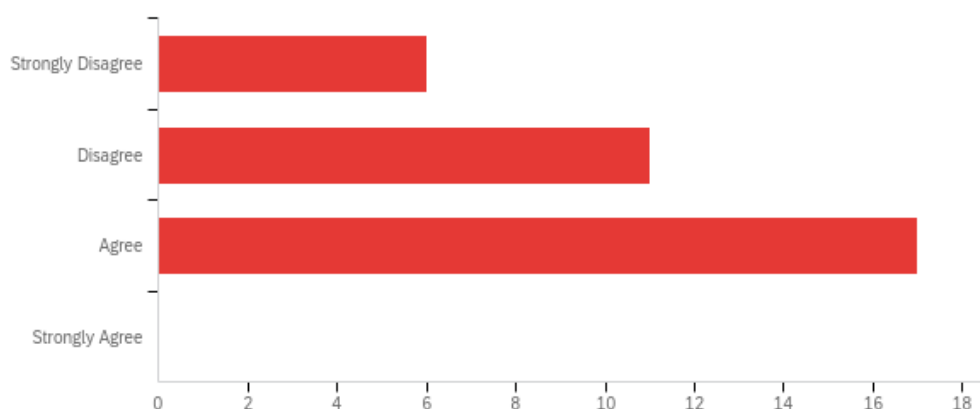
for.

Question 14

Question 14, an agree/disagree statement asked participants if the MSCC alumni

association makes it easy to stay in touch with them. Thirty-four alumni answered this

question: 50%, or 17 respondents, selected agree; 32.35%, or 11 respondents, selected

disagree; 17.65%, or six respondents, selected strongly disagree. No one selected strongly

agree as an answer. The results of this answer are split right down the middle with 50%

agreeing that the MSCC alumni association makes it easy to stay in touch with them,

while exactly 50% disagree in some way that the MSCC alumni association makes it easy

to stay in contact with them. This is another example of when a bar graph might not be a

great visual representation because if one looks at the mode, agree, one thinks that most

participants agree with this statement. The best way to look at the data for this question is

to look at disagree and strongly disagree as a category while agree and strongly agree

would be a separate category. The majority of the participants disagreed that the MSCC

alumni association makes it easy to stay in contact with them. Figure 22 shows the responses to Question 14. The mode, agree, is indicated by the longest bar, but if you add the two disagree statements up, they are more than the mode.

Figure 22

Question 14 Bar Graph

Question 14 - The MSCC Alumni Association makes it easy to stay in contact with them.
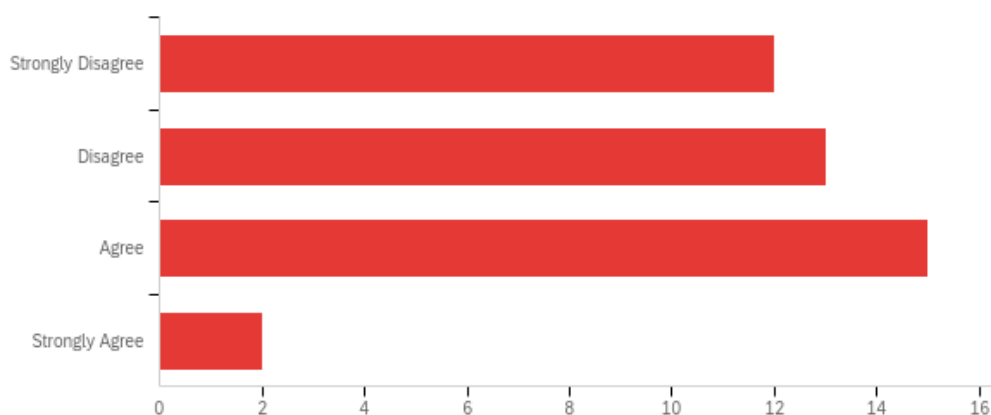

Question 15

Question 15, an agree/disagree statement, asked participants if the MSCC alumni association regularly communicates with them using their preferred mode of communication. Forty-two alumni answered this question: 35.71%, or 15 respondents, selected agree; 4.76%, or two respondents, selected strongly agree; 30.95%, or 13 respondents, selected disagree; 28.57%, or 12 respondents, selected strongly disagree. Overall, more respondents selected the disagree category than the agree category: 59.52%, or 25 respondents, selected disagree in some form, either disagree or strongly disagree; 40.47%, or 17 participants, selected agree in some form, either agree or strongly agree. This is another great example of not being able to look at the mode (agree) to

determine if the statement truly reflects how the alumni participant group feels. The majority of alumni participants disagree in some form that the MSCC alumni association regularly communicates with them using their preferred mode of communication. Figure 23 shows the responses to Question 15. The mode, agree, is indicated by the longest bar, but if you add the two disagree statements up, they are more than the mode.

Figure 23

Question 15 Bar Graph

Question 15 – The MSCC Alumni Association regularly communicates with me using my preferred mode of communication.
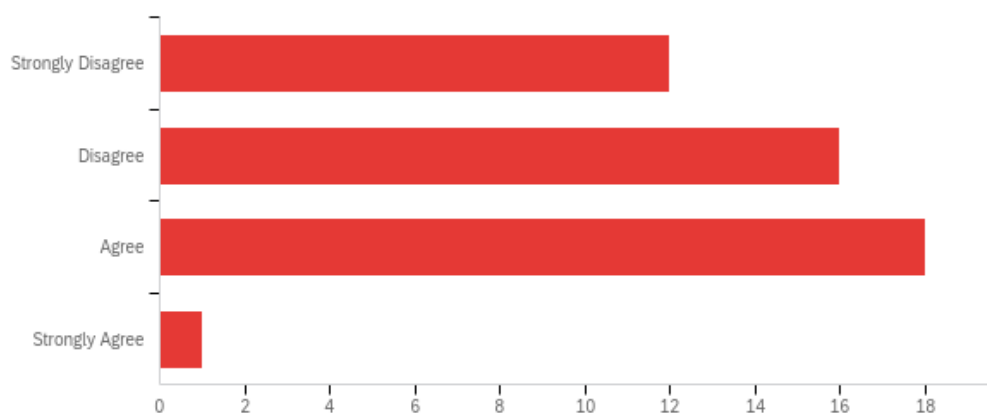

Question 16

Question 16, an agree/disagree statement, asked participants if the MSCC alumni association made them aware of alumni events. Forty-seven alumni answered this question: 38.30%, or 18 respondents, selected agree; 2.13%, or one respondent, selected strongly agree; 34.04%, or 16 respondents, selected disagree; 25.53%, or 12 respondents, selected strongly disagree. Overall, more respondents selected the disagree category than the agree category: 59.57%, or 28 respondents, selected disagree in some form, either disagree or strongly disagree; 40.43%, or 19 participants, selected agree in some form,

either agree or strongly agree. This is another great example of not being able to look at the mode (agree) to determine if the statement truly reflects how the alumni participant group feels. The majority of alumni participants disagree in some form that the MSCC alumni association makes them aware of alumni events. Figure 24 shows the responses to Question 16. The mode, agree, is indicated by the longest bar, but if you add the two disagree statements up, they are more than the mode.

Figure 24

Question 16 Bar Graph

Question 16 – The MSCC Alumni Association makes me aware of alumni events.

Question 17

Question 17, an agree/disagree statement asked participants if the MSCC alumni association provided meaningful events for alumni. Thirty-two alumni answered this question: 59.38%, or 19 respondents, selected agree; 28.13%, or nine respondents, selected disagree; 12.50%, or four respondents, selected strongly disagree. No respondents selected strongly agree. Figure 25 shows the responses to Question 17. The mode, agree, is indicated by the longest bar.

Figure 25

Question 17 Bar Graph

Question 17 – The MSCC Alumni Association provides meaningful events for alumni.
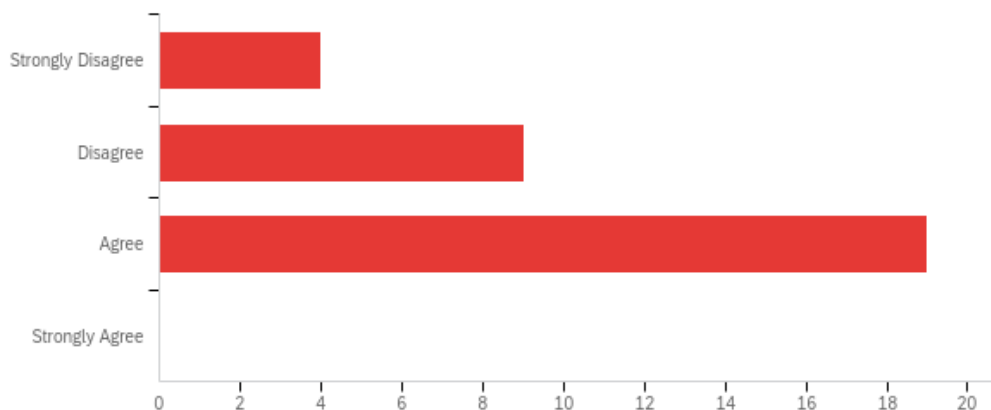
Quantitative Summary

The quantitative analysis showed that data analysis sometimes requires a deeper look than a quick bar graph or chart. The quantitative data reveal that an alarming number of recent alumni (91.53%) do not attend MSCC alumni association events. The data also revealed an alarming number of recent alumni (92.98%) do not donate to the MSCC alumni association. Other important statistical data that were revealed in the study are related to communication.

- 59.52% of recent alumni do not think the MSCC alumni association regularly communicates with them using their preferred mode of communication.
- 59.57% of recent alumni do not think the MSCC alumni association makes them aware of alumni events.
- 50% of recent alumni state that the MSCC alumni association does not make it easy to stay in contact with them.
- 53.57% do not believe the MSCC alumni association makes it clear what

donated money is for.

All these quantitative data are important in that they show a pattern. The pattern is that recent alumni are not involved with or donating to the MSCC alumni association. From the agree/disagree statements, it appears that recent alumni sense a lack of communication and information from the MSCC alumni association.

Summary

The qualitative data and the quantitative data combine to tell a story. The story is that recent alumni do not donate to the MSCC alumni association and do not attend MSCC alumni association events. The lack of monetary donations and lack of involvement and engagement are due to a lack of communication. The lack of information has negative implications in regard to recent alumni financial support of the MSCC alumni association. The last chapter of this study combines the literature review and data collection analysis results in order to make suggestions to the MSCC alumni association. The recommendations were developed with the research question in mind in order to help solve the significant problem of how to get recent alumni to monetarily support the MSCC alumni association. Chapter 5 details how to make the change and key recommendations for the process.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

Introduction

The main purpose of this dissertation in action was to address a significant

problem in my partnering organization, the MSCC alumni association. The significant

problem the organization was facing was how to get recent alumni to donate money to

financially support the alumni association. The research question, "Why are recent

community college alumni not donating money to their alma mater," guided the research

and was the primary topic of study. The systematic review for this study included a

literature review of the topic and utilized a mixed methods convergent design alumni

survey. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings based on both the literature review

and the data collected from the survey.

Lastly, the culminating final step of this dissertation in practice is to make

suggestions and recommendations to the MSCC alumni association. The

recommendations are discussed at length below and then presented in the development of

an action plan, which addresses the significant problem of this study. Sustainable

recommendations in the action plan contribute to the continued success of the MSCC

alumni association and its purpose. The implementation of the action plan will be at the

sole discretion of the alumni association and the executive director of advancement.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study show that MSCC recent alumni are not donating to their

alma mater. In general, the findings on MSCC's recent alumni donation behaviors are

consistent with the literature review. The reasons recent alumni do not give are what we

would expect, based on the literature review. Recent alumni do not give because they are

not involved and engaged. They are not involved and engaged primarily due to a lack of communication. The findings suggest the need for better promotion and improved communication strategies.

Key Recommendations to the Organization

Key recommendations for MSCC are based on both the literature review and the survey results. The findings of the literature review revealed four factors that helped determine alumni giving. The four factors were: student experience, trust and transparency in giving, communication, and alumni engagement. The survey results revealed that recent alumni felt the need for more communication and information from the MSCC alumni association. Findings from both the literature review and the survey results are integrated into the recommendations. Key recommendations to the MSCC alumni association were

- transform alumni association

- improve communication

- develop strategic programming

Each of the recommendations is highlighted in the following section. Each section provides steps and guidance on how to implement the key recommendation in order to address the significant challenge. The ultimate goal is to increase financial support for the MSCC alumni association from recent alumni.

Recommendation 1: Transform Alumni Association

The first key recommendation for my consultancy partner is to transform the alumni association. Due to the end of the 50th anniversary of junior college graduates, alumni events and fundraising efforts by the MSCC alumni association will need to

transition to be more inclusive of recent graduates. Active members of the alumni

association are predominately from the junior college era and not recent alumni. While

the alumni association is an integral part of the college, a transformation would ensure its

long-term viability.

SWOT Analysis. In order to transform an organization, you must first take a

comprehensive look at the organization. I recommend the alumni association conduct a

SWOT analysis of their department. A SWOT analysis is an analytic tool that stands for

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Utilizing a SWOT-type analysis

helps to give organizations and/or departments an advantage over other similar

organizations and departments because it helps to identify areas where they are doing

well and areas that need improvement. "A SWOT analysis represents an effort to

examine the interaction between the particular characteristics of your organization or

organizational unit and the external environment, or marketplace, in which you compete"

(Dubrin, 2016, p. 428). A SWOT analysis provides details in four main areas: internal

strengths, internal weaknesses, external opportunities, and external threats, all of which

are important to the culture of the MSCC alumni association. If utilized correctly, a

SWOT analysis can help drive an improvement plan or even help to establish a strategic

plan, which happens to be part of the next section.

Strategic Alignment. As part of the transformation process, I recommend the

MSCC alumni association develop a strategic plan, including a mission and vision

statement, goals, and objectives for the association. Developing strategic plans is

necessary because the MSCC alumni association currently has no strategic plans in place,

other than a constitution and by-laws. Strategic is often defined as strategy and is often

associated with the word plan or planning. Strategic leadership is defined as "the process

of providing the direction and inspiration necessary to create or sustain an organization"

(DuBrin, 2016, p. 420). Strategic leadership creates organizational direction and

alignment (Hughes et al., 2014). Strategic planning is often thought to be long-term since

the word strategy is defined as "a careful plan or method for achieving a particular goal

usually over a long period of time" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.); however, this is not always

the case, as strategic planning can also be short-term. Strategic planning and leading

relate to mindset or acting on ideas, or strategic acting, which includes both short-term

and long-term planning (Hughes et al., 2014). Strategic plans help guide organizations

toward a common goal and help align processes and policies. Strategic alignment would

allow the MSCC alumni association to identify its values and beliefs to alumni,

employees, students, donors, and the general public. The mission statement tells the

meaning and purpose of the alumni association, what it stands for, and what it is trying to

achieve. The vision statement provides a concrete way for all stakeholders to understand

the meaning and purpose and describes the desired long-term results of efforts to guide

the MSCC alumni association. All successful alumni groups have an advisory board of

some sort that establishes the program's mission and goals (Boyd et al., 2009).

Institutional planning for the alumni group is key and an effective fundraising strategy to

form a link between the mission of the college, the mission of the alumni group, and the

strategic plan (Anderson 2003, as cited in Akin, 2005).

Identify Stakeholders. The third recommendation under transforming is for the

MSCC alumni association to define alumni and define who qualifies as alumni

association members. The term alumni is often difficult to define at community colleges

because of short-term workforce training, non-credit classes, community-based classes, and hobby or "just for fun" classes that often take place at community colleges. The open access, inclusive nature of community colleges makes defining alumni tricky. The alumni definition could be broad to include anyone who has "found success at the college and benefited from attending" (Boyd et al., 2009, p. 99), or it could be narrow and only include individuals who have completed a degree or certificate. Many individuals will benefit from the college but not necessarily graduate. Since the college added value to their lives and since the college is possibly "the most important institution of higher education they will ever attend" (Boyd et al., 2009, p. 99), it is feasible to consider them alumni. Even though there are multiple definitions of the term alumni used by various community colleges, it is vitally important to be clear in fundraising efforts about what it means to be a part of the alumni community (Heaton, 2014).

Create Transparency in Giving Plan. The last suggestion within transforming is to develop a transparency in giving plan as it helps to build trust in the association. Individuals want to know where the money they donate goes and what it supports. Community college donors believe in the missions of the colleges they support, but donors want to know that the college is being a good steward of the contributions (McDearmon, 2010). Research supports "transparent, consistent, and ethical reporting of charitable contributions to nonprofit and public educational institutions" (Kaplan, 2023, p. 4). Young alumni are not aware of the impact their financial donations have on the college so it is crucial to show evidence of each monetary gift and how each gift impacts the institution (McDearmon, 2010). Mo and Zhu (2022) reported that in order to gain alumni trust, the institution must establish governance and transparency, which increase

alumni willingness to donate. That same study stated that "openness and transparency" (Mo & Zhu, 2022, p. 14) were important to donors and potential donors.

Alumni survey data supported this research as well. One respondent stated they do not give to the MSCC alumni association because they "generally don't believe in making blind donations to organizations." Two respondents on the MSCC alumni survey stated they do not give because they do not know what the money would be used for. When asked what could persuade them to donate, 20 of 25 respondents indicated the need to know more information about the donations, such as what the money goes to and what the money supports. Alumni made statements such as, "I'd like to make sure my money is being put to a good cause and see progress." One alumni survey respondent was very clear about their needs to consider donating.

> Information about the MSCC Alumni Association, a rough estimate of what contributions would be helpful, future plans for the money. [I need full transparency when it comes to donating for causes so I can feel assured the money is used properly.]

These responses support the need for a transparency in giving plan. A transparent plan in giving would allow MSCC to show stakeholders how gifts impact students and the institution. Showcasing gifts on the alumni website or in print literature does not discourage giving but demonstrates the worthiness of the investment (Heaton, 2014). Both the literature and the survey results make it clear that alumni want more information in order to donate money.

Recommendation 2: Improve Communication

The second key recommendation for the MSCC alumni association is to improve

communication. Effective communication is important to any organization, but it is vitally important to institutions focused on fundraising and soliciting donors. As a whole, community colleges tend "to do a poor job of tracking their former students and keeping in touch on a regular basis" (Magaw, 2013, p 2). "Community colleges can generate more alumni gifts if they increase the number of alumni contacted and improve the effectiveness of their solicitations" (Skari, 2014, p 24). While the primary link to alumni upon graduation is the responsibility of the alumni association, it is everyone's job at the college to reinforce the institution's narrative to contribute to successful understanding and communication regarding the college. Overall, "community colleges have to do a better job communicating with students on campus and once they leave" (Magaw, 2013, p. 2).

Update Alumni Contact Information. The first step toward improving communication is to update alumni contact information, including accurate email addresses: 50.47% of MSCC recent alumni surveyed indicated that their preferred method of communication was email, but many of the email addresses were returned as undeliverable. Of the 3,054 individuals, there were 1,370 emails returned as undeliverable, which means that 55.1% were returned. I received one reply email stating that I had the wrong recipient because they had never attended MSCC. There is also the possibility that other emails were sent to incorrect recipients. MSCC has options for updating alumni contact information, which should be done frequently. MSCC can outsource this work to a third-party organization that specializes in this type of endeavor, or they could work on this project in-house. Some colleges utilize "work study students to conduct research for building a database of potential alumni (Boyd et al., 2009, p. 98).

The development of a plan to obtain permanent contact information, including emails

from students prior to graduation, is necessary. The most important suggestion to

improve communication is to update alumni contact information and data frequently and

to routinely participate in the national change of address program (Heaton, 2014).

      Marketing Campaign. The second step in improving communication is to

develop a marketing campaign that raises awareness of the alumni association,

association events, membership information, and fundraising campaigns. Alumni surveys

revealed that many alumni felt there was a lack of communication from the MSCC

alumni association. A total of 36.73%, 18 of 49 comments, focused on the lack of

information they had received regarding alumni events. One respondent commented, "I

do not attend MSCC Alumni Association events because I do not receive any

communication about them." Several other respondents indicated that they had not heard

of any alumni association events. A marketing campaign that improves and increases

communication would benefit both alumni and the association.

      Communication should be frequent and vary between alumni news, college/

faculty/staff updates, student success, and fundraising efforts. Not all communication

should be appeals to donate, as this tends to have the opposite effect on potential donors.

Communication needs to be a two-way street, with communication flowing in both

directions. Successful alumni groups actively solicit alumni opinions, stories,

accomplishments, achievements, and celebrations, such as job status, marital status, and

parenthood status (Heaton, 2014) Follow-up communication is the communication that

occurs after alumni events, and it is just as important to alumni as initial points of contact

(Levine, 2008). Lack of follow-up creates a dissatisfied donor. Follow-up communication

should include results of fundraising efforts, data on individual gifts, and updates on events after they occurred. Put in as much effort on social media in promoting events afterward as beforehand (Masterson, 2017). Follow-up communication is important for fundraising because alumni indicated they want to know what the association does and where their money goes in order to donate money to the association. The marketing campaign needs to tell the stories of those helped by alumni funds, highlight student success stories, and the impact of alumni funds. Videos and media clips should showcase individual students and how alumni donations helped those students achieve goals, such as graduation. Even though the survey indicated that email was the preferred method of communication, it is important to utilize a variety of other communication methods. A good marketing campaign will use a variety of texts, mailings, campus signage, phone calls, local TV, local radio, and social media. Social media warrants a separate section (which follows) as an additional suggestion due to its unique applications and vast opportunities.

  Utilize Social Media. The third suggestion for improving communications is to utilize social media. Social media is an alternative and nontraditional avenue that should be utilized to improve communication. The combined use of mobile devices with social media offers "rapid and effective communication with prospective donors" (Hall, 2016, 15). Many current students and recent alumni are "technologically savvy and willing to adopt multiple tools, including social media, to express opinions" (Cho et al., 2019, p. 25). I suggest the MSCC alumni association take advantage of social media and technology and use them to their advantage. One suggestion is for the MSCC alumni association to help current students build LinkedIn profiles and teach students how to use

the social networking app to establish additional means of communication upon

graduation. The MSCC alumni association could launch crowdfunding campaigns

through various internet platforms to connect with potential donors before they graduate

and increase their post-graduation giving (Cho et al., 2019). Crowdfunding through social

media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn increases the potential of sharing

opportunities via social networks with additional potential donors. The use of social

media communication has the potential to increase communication contacts

astronomically, as well as inform fundraising practices (Hall, 2016). It is important to

note that this suggestion will likely prove to be an ongoing endeavor because of how

rapidly new technology, apps, and social media change.

Recommendation 3: Strategic Programming

The third key recommendation is for the MSCC alumni association to develop

strategic programming. The focus of this recommendation is to build and develop

relationships, improve connections, and increase engagement with potential donors.

Monetary contributions reflect "a tangible expression of a connection between donor and

university" (Cho et al., 2019, p. 28), or in this case community college. Programming

efforts are not normally seen as a function of an alumni association, but rather a function

of student life or student government association; however, this needs to change since

research places a significant emphasis on student experience and alumni engagement for

building future donors. The first step to strategic programming is to develop a

programming plan. Part of the plan should be focused on students, while part of the plan

should be focused on alumni, and part of the plan should be a collaborative effort to join

students and alumni together. The following sections discuss each component.

Develop Student Relationships. The first step to strategic programming is to develop a student programming plan. The MSCC alumni association can build relationships with students by connecting with students while students are on campus. According to literature, the student experience is one of the top predictors of alumni giving. One study found, "Three factors associated with student experience were statistically significant: (a) satisfaction with student experience, (b) value of student involvement, and (c) the importance of relationships" (Skari, 2014, p. 35). Relationships and a feeling of being connected to the college are significant. Higher education institutions can increase the chances of alumni becoming "future donors by creating positive educational experiences for students that culminate in graduation" (Skari, 2014, p. 38). Campus leaders can help create a culture of philanthropy and giving on campus so "students will leave campus with a built-in understanding of their responsibility to give back and a willingness to do so much sooner" (Gasman, 2012, para. 7). Student relationship-building endeavors must be done in a way that is relevant, meaningful, and valuable for both students and alumni groups (Schmidt, 2018). The recent alumni survey had a few comments regarding student experience. When asked about attending alumni events, one respondent stated, "Don't know what events there are and I don't know that I feel that kind of connection to the school." When asked about why one donates or does not donate to the MSCC alumni association, one respondent replied, "My experience at MSCC." While student experience was not the most common response to any of the three open-ended survey questions, student experience and connection to one's alma mater is highly documented in literature as one of the most common reasons alumni give. Student engagement begins during the beginning stages of the student's relationship with the

college. Engagement begins during recruitment, admission, and enrollment (Schmidt, 2018). MSCC can enhance the student experience by building relationships and cultivating those relationships. The cultivation of donors begins by "creating a meaningful collegiate experience for students" (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009, p. 93). MSCC can accomplish this by collaborating with various departments across the college to host events such as workshops, coffee talks, leadership opportunities, community service events, and other social type gatherings. Fun and memorable events such as campus excursions create a positive student experience, which is key. "How and to what degree an individual student is engaged" (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009, p. 85) can impact donation practices years after graduation. "Refining the campus experience for students (as future alumni and potential donors) is continuous but critical work in order to build a sustainable ecosystem" (Mo & Zhu, 2022, p. 13).

Improve Alumni Engagement. The MSCC alumni association should develop a programming plan for alumni engagement. Having a plan helps with scheduling and assures that tasks get accomplished. Getting to know recent alumni by creating follow-up surveys is essential because in order to engage alumni, community colleges must first get to know and understand alumni (Skari, 2014). The next step for alumni engagement is to increase the programs and types of activities in which alumni can become involved. One of the respondents on the survey stated that they could be persuaded to donate if the college offered "more fun events." Another said, "fun event that is kid friendly," while another wanted "to see more community service events done by alumni." One comment on the survey stated, "I would definitely go to events. I just don't hear about them." These responses indicate that alumni are willing to participate in various alumni

activities. MSCC can start engaging alumni by simply inviting alumni to participate in campus activities, such as music recitals, book club meetings, job fairs, and awards day. I also suggest MSCC alumni association do the following:

- Offer a wide variety of options for alumni participation and engagement. Social gatherings at local parks or meet-and-greets at restaurants are ideal, especially alumni-owned and/or operated facilities.

- Sponsor alumni days on campus where alumni can visit certain departments and see students in action in classes such as culinary, welding, or a nursing simulation.

- Offer campus tours geared to alumni so the focus is not on recruitment and enrollment. This allows alumni to revisit familiar places and see campus changes firsthand.

- Begin offering 1-year reunions, which bring alumni back to campus sooner, rather than later, "with the intent of getting them into the practice of returning as alumni" (Masterson, 2017, para. 3).

- Offer workshops, leadership opportunities, and business networking geared to alumni.

- Host a resume writing event or job fair and invite alumni.

- Partner with the archives department to host an alumni scanning day so alumni can bring their college artifacts and memorabilia to the campus to be scanned and immediately returned to the alumni.

- Ask alumni to volunteer to serve as an advisory committee member or an ambassador or to volunteer at yearly events such as commencement. It is

empowering for alumni to be asked to help with such endeavors, which in turn creates buy-in and ownership (Gasman, 2012). Donors who feel buy-in and connection to the institution happily and willingly justify their monetary support (Schmidt, 2018).

- The most important suggestion for alumni engagement is that engagement must happen early. As alumni approach their 10th anniversary of graduation, they are identified as alumni "in danger of becoming uninvested" (Rau & Erwin, 2015, p. 109). Develop alumni relationships early by getting permanent contact information prior to graduation and by pursuing alumni connections immediately after graduation; even if recent graduates are not able to immediately donate, the relationship is key to future donations. "It is important to engage alumni early to establish and preserve relationships and thereby garner larger contributions as individuals become more connected and financially solvent" (Kaplan, 2023, p. 11).

Collaborative Projects. The first step in developing collaborative programing is to develop a plan. Collaborative programming combines efforts to reach both current students and recent alumni. Collaborative projects can be ongoing partnerships such as regularly scheduled lunch dates or coffee tip sessions in which alumni share a cup of coffee and advice with students. One of my suggestions is to pair recent alumni with current students to create alumni mentor and student-mentee relationships. I know firsthand how beneficial a mentor relationship can be to students in school and in future careers, so alumni could be asked to serve as career advisors and mentors. Collaborative projects can also be one-time projects with a common goal in mind. The alumni

association would facilitate the meeting with both students and alumni participants. Collaborative projects and programming that involve both students and alumni help to foster connections and build bridges between both groups and the alumni association. One of my suggestions is for the MSCC alumni association to bring back the college mascot and to allow current students and recent alumni to give feedback and have input on the final mascot design. This would help to create a connection that would last for years to come, and it would help anchor students and alumni to the college and the college mascot. Alumni who are informed, treated as valuable team members, and see that their feedback matters have a greater likelihood of contributing to the financial success of their alma mater.

Summary of Key Recommendations

The key recommendations will help MSCC with the significant problem regarding recent alumni fundraising. These suggestions contribute to building a strong, robust potential donor group. The combined efforts of transforming the alumni association, improving communication, and strategic programming help to build connections and relationships and strengthen trust between the institution and potential donors. Trust is crucial in fundraising efforts and serves as a "vital determinant and decisive link to donation in the higher education sphere" (Mo & Zhu, 2022, p.13). The key recommendations and suggestions were developed into an action plan presented in the following section.

Action Plan

Higher education institutions that strive toward learning and continuous improvement through the use of well-researched action plans thrive and prosper. This

study utilizes an action plan to solve the significant problem facing the MSCC alumni association. The action plan is divided into sections organized by the key recommendations: transform alumni association, improve communication, and strategic programming. The recommendations serve as supporting goals, while the ultimate goal is to have a positive impact on fundraising efforts. Each goal includes several measurable objectives, also referred to as outcomes. The action plan includes a list of needed resources for each goal, such as groups, individuals, or other supporting items. Most recommendations have a set estimated length of time it will take to accomplish the outcome, but Recommendation 3, Develop Strategic Programming, is ongoing. Also listed are the individuals, departments, or committees responsible for implementation and completing the objectives. Lastly, each objective has an indicator of success that will determine when the outcome has been met. Some items may take up to 6 months to implement from start to finish. This means that the department would go through some significant changes in less than 1 year. Ideally, the action plan would coincide with the start of a new academic year, which would allow a transition period during the summer semester when enrollment is normally lower and employees would have more time to adjust to changes. This would help ease employees into the changes prior to the start of the busier fall semester.

The MSCC alumni association can use the action plan to improve communication, develop relationships with students, and increase engagement with recent graduates. By following the steps in Lewin's Three-Step Change Theory, the MSCC alumni association could successfully implement the recommendations and changes found in the action plan. In the process of implementing the action plan, a strong, supportive alumni base will

develop through improved communication and relationship building. As previously

stated, the implementation of the action place will be at the sole discretion of the alumni

association and the executive director of advancement. To summarize the information for

my partner organization and project host, I created a condensed one-page version of the

key information found in Chapter 5 (see Appendix B for project host one-page summary).

Figures 26-28 show each of the action plans based on the three recommendations. Figure

26 is Recommendation 1: Transform Alumni Association. Figure 27 is Recommendation

2: Improve Communication. Figure 28 is Recommendation 3: Develop Strategic

Programming.

Figure 26

Action Plan-Recommendation 1

ACTION PLAN Recommendation One: Transform Alumni Association				
Objectives	**Resources**	**Timeline**	**Responsibility**	**Indicators of Success**
Conduct SWOT Analysis 1. Determine Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats through a SWOT analysis	• Employees • Students • Alumni association • SWOT surveys	2-4 months	• Office for Advancement • Alumni Association	A thorough SWOT analysis is completed and data is analyzed.
Strategic Alignment 1. Develop Strategic Plan 2. Write Mission & Vision Statement, Goals & Objectives	• College strategic plans • College Mission statement • College Vision statement • Alumni association constitution and by-laws • SWOT analysis	6 months	• Office for Advancement • Alumni Association • Marketing Department	Strategic plan, mission, vision, goals & objectives posted, emailed, advertised, communicated, and shared, both face-to-face and virtually (email, social media, website, Libguide).
Identify Stakeholders 1. Define Alumni 2. Define Alumni Association Members	• Alumni association constitution and by-laws • Strategic plans & supporting documents	2 weeks	• Office for Advancement • Alumni Association • Marketing Department	Definition of alumni & definition of alumni association members are posted, emailed, advertised, communicated, and shared top to bottom, across all areas of the institution and association.
Create Transparency in Giving Plan 1. Create a transparent donation plan for recent donations, current donations, & future donations	• Previous donation data	2-4 months	• Office for Advancement • Alumni Association	Current donation data posted on alumni association website & Libguide & advertised to all stakeholders utilizing electronic and paper delivery. Plan in place for future donations.

Figure 27

Action Plan-Recommendation 2

<table>
<tr>
<th colspan="5">ACTION PLAN
Recommendation Two: Improve Communication</th>
</tr>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Indicators of Success</th>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update Alumni Contact Information
1. Update alumni database with current contact information</td>
<td>• Current contact information
• Campus notification system</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>• Office for Advancement
• Records Office</td>
<td>Percentage of undeliverable emails decrease. Phone calls & text messages increase. Notifications distributed via campus-wide notification system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Campaign
1. Produce student success videos & commercials
2. Develop internet signage (college website, alumni website, alumni Libguide)
3. Design campus signage (posters, banners, flyers, Digital TVs)</td>
<td>• Current students
• Alumni
• Faculty/Staff
• Director of Marketing
• Director of Printing and Graphic Design
• Web Strategist</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>• Office for Advancement
• Director of Marketing</td>
<td>Videos & commercials aired on local TV & radio, published on YouTube, posted on social media & college website. Slides, banners, & ads posted on college website, alumni webpage, & alumni Libguide. Digital TV broadcast system regularly updated. Traditional print materials posted on campus at various locations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize Social Media
1. Create a social media plan & generate a schedule for regular social media updates & posts
2. Utilize LinkedIn to help students build profiles & maintain contact with students upon graduation</td>
<td>• LinkedIn
• Twitter
• Instagram
• Facebook
• Documents & Graphics
• LinkedIn Workshop
• Workshop Facilitator</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>• Office for Advancement
• Director of Marketing</td>
<td>Social media posts regularly updated. LinkedIn connections with students and alumni increases.</td>
</tr>
</table>

Figure 28

Action Plan-Recommendation 3

ACTION PLAN — Recommendation Three: Develop Strategic Programming				
Objectives	**Resources**	**Timeline**	**Responsibility**	**Indicators of Success**
Build Student Relationships 1. Develop a Student Programming Plan 2. Collaborate with other departments to host activities for current students 3. Host new or participate in current student leadership programs 4. Facilitate workshops that focus on personal growth	• SGA • Library • Early Colleges • Student Ambassadors • 3M Program • Futures Program • Faculty/Staff • Workshop facilitators	Ongoing	• Office for Advancement • Alumni Association • Representatives from departments across campus	Student programming plan developed. Student-focused activities regularly scheduled & held on campus & off campus in the community & advertised via multiple formats. Collaborative partnerships developed. Student leadership program in place. Various workshops on personal growth offered.
Improve Alumni Engagement 1. Develop alumni programming plan 2. Increase social activities for alumni 3. Create opportunities for alumni leadership and business networking 4. Facilitate workshops that focus on professional growth	• College leadership • Student groups • Local business owners • Local community leaders • Workshop facilitators	Ongoing	• Office for Advancement • Alumni Association • Representatives from departments across campus	Alumni programming plan developed. Alumni-focused activities regularly scheduled & held on campus & off campus in the community & advertised via multiple formats. Business network created. Various workshops on professional development offered.
Collaborative Projects 1. Develop collaborative programming plan 2. Image branding-Redesign Maverick Mascot 3. Alumni/student-mentor/mentor program	• Previous mascots • Students • Alumni • Mentors • Mentees	Ongoing	• Director of Marketing • Office for Advancement	Introduce designs to the college during a mandatory college-wide faculty/staff meeting and student assembly. Mentor/mentee program in place.

Conclusion

In times of financial uncertainty and increasing budget restraints, it is extremely important for community colleges "to not lose out on alumni donations even from the youngest generation of graduates" (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009, p. 93). Community college alumni associations need to have a clear understanding of what impacts all ages of alumni to give as soliciting donations from young alumni will be an ongoing challenge facing community colleges "well into the future" (McDearmon, 2010, p. 46).

In conclusion, "every institution, small or large, needs strong fundraising to thrive in an increasingly complex and competitive environment" (Schmidt, 2018, Fundraising section). "Higher education shares a distinctive position among charities in that individuals come to it first as a consumer then as a donor" (Wastyn, 2009, p. 101); therefore, it is up to the community college to convert student consumers to active alumni donors. This conversion is not an overnight process. Developing and implementing change is a long process and takes time and patience to cultivate. The reward is worth the effort in the long run, as the payoff is a successful, thriving alumni association.

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Appendix A

IRB Certificate

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 10-Jan-2022
Expiration Date 09-Jan-2025
Record ID 46529955

This is to certify that:

Beverly Rufty

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Graduate School of Education Research Investigators
(Curriculum Group)
Graduate School of Education Research Investigators
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Gardner-Webb University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wda822631-2a57-496e-82e3-fd91c42f7854-46529955

Appendix B

Project Host One Page Summary

DEOL Candidate: Beverly Rufty

Consultancy Project: Recent Community College Alumni: Increasing Donors through Communication and Engagement

Methodology: Convergent Design Mixed Methodology survey utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data.

Data Analysis: Out of the survey responses, 91.53% of alumni indicated they do not attend alumni association events. The majority of the responses indicated they do not attend because they do not know about the events. 92.98% of alumni indicated they do not donate to the alumni association. The majority of the responses indicated they are not unaware of the option to donate, unaware of the association, or not sure how the money would be used.

Summary of Findings: Recent alumni do not give, are not involved, nor engaged with the alumni association primarily due to lack of communication. Three communication related themes have been identified and support these findings:
> 1. Lack of information on alumni association
> 2. Lack of awareness of alumni association events
> 3. Lack of knowledge about donations and how donated money is spent

The findings suggest the need for better promotion and improved communication strategies.

Recommendations: (See Action Plan for additional details.)

1. **Transform Alumni Association**
   - Conduct SWOT analysis
   - Strategic alignment
   - Identify stakeholders
   - Create transparency in giving plan
2. **Improve Communication**
   - Update alumni contact information
   - Marketing campaign
   - Utilize social media
3. **Develop Strategic Programming**
   - Build student relationships
   - Improve alumni engagement
   - Collaborative projects